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FAILURES

A PLAY IN FOURTEEN SCENES

TIME IS A DREAM

A PLAY IN SIX SCENES

by H. R. LENORMAND

is also included in this volume

Setting by Lee Simonson *Photo by Francis Brugiere*

HE *and* SHE

Jacob Ben Ami and Winifred Lenihan in The Theatre Guild Production

FAILURES

A PLAY IN FOURTEEN SCENES

Translated from the French of
H. R. LENORMAND
by Winifred Katzin

New York ALFRED · A · KNOPF *Mcmxxiii*

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The cast of the

THEATRE GUILD PRODUCTION

as originally presented

at the GARRICK THEATRE, *New York,*
November, 19th, 1923

THE FAILURES

A Play in Thirteen Scenes by

H. R. LENORMAND

(Translated from the French by Winifred Katzin)

The production directed by Stark Young
Settings and Costumes by Lee Simonson

CHARACTERS
(*In Order of Appearance*)

Montredon	Dudley Digges
He	Jacob Ben Ami
She	Winifred Lenihan
Second Phantom	Sterling Holloway
The Musician	Erskine Sanford
The Bell Boy	Philip Loeb
Larnaudy	Henry Crosby
A Dresser	Helen Westley
The Ingenue	Helen Tilden
The Duenna	Alice Belmore Cliffe
An Actor	Ernest A. Daniels
Saint-Gallet	Henry Travers
The Magistrate	Morris Carnovsky
Magistrate's Daughter	Hildegarde Halliday
The Private	Ernest A. Daniels
The Corporal	Jo Mielziner
The Librarian	Philip Loeb
His Wife	Ida Zeitlin
The Rake	Herbert Ashton
The Chemist	Henry Clement
The Barmaid	Yvonne Sec
A Hunchback Girl	Polly Craig
A Commissioner of Police	Morris Carnovsky

19381

SCENES

Scene 1—A Rehearsal Room—Paris.
Scene 2—A Room—Boulevard Montparnasse.—Two years later.
Scene 3—A Hotel Bedroom. On Tour.
Scene 4—A Hotel Room. Bar-le-Duc.
Scene 5—Juliet's Dressing Room at the Theatre.
Scene 6—Same as Scene 4.
Scene 7—Interior of a Gothic Cathedral.

INTERMISSION

Scene 8—A Provincial Café.
Scene 9—A Lobby of a Provincial Theatre.
Scene 10—A Hotel Bedroom.
Scene 11—A Station Waiting Room.
Scene 12—A Hotel Bedroom; Flanders.
Scene 13—The Same.

Stage Manager, Robert Cook. *Assistant Stage Manager*, Jo Mielziner.

Note: Scene IX in the book was eliminated in the Guild Production.

THE THEATRE GUILD, INC.

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PREFACE

To waste time over whether Lenormand's *Les Ratés* is a great play or not gets us nowhere. There is a body of plays of the first rank, *Oedipus Rex, Macbeth, Hamlet* and so on, that are great plays in any sense. But there are also plays less than these that are extraordinary for many reasons, *He Who Gets Slapped, The Bonds of Interest, Candida,* for example; *Les Ratés* is one of these.

To a member of another race, an Anglo-Saxon, say, or a Russian, Lenormand's play may not at first come easy. It is one of those productions, not wholly infrequent in France, that ought to be a great work of art and yet is not quite so. There is something about *Les Ratés* that keeps one thinking of the great dramas of the world, those masterpieces that appear only with the lapse of epochs and centuries and only blessedly then; and yet you know all the while that *Les Ratés* never rises to the plane of one of these.

Les Ratés is one of those French pieces that may surprise an Anglo-Saxon by their achievement and their extraordinary reach. It is the product of both insight and sheer artifice. Looking into *Les Ratés* we see the craft of it; the admitted contrivance; the placement of this scene and that, one following the other with secure and telling skill; the range and combinations of types and characters; the invention of searching situations, of revealing incidents; the fluent manipulation of people and events in order to expose ideas and to set

out the psychological and dramatic themes; the ingenuities of irony and semi-repetition; the steady progression toward the final greatest intensity of effect and the concluding ironical blur at the very end. All this we see if we know anything at all of the art of the drama; an infant in the art would get in the course of the play a hint of all this. And yet we see at the same time that from this artifice and this perpetual contrivance something does emerge; the effect and the impression arrive; the idea stands out; the play moves us, shakes us, darkens and glows and breaks in the mind.

Les Ratés, moreover, may not be easy for us because of its volubility; which appears in the copiousness with which the characters express themselves, find figures of speech, words, images and spurts of warm or bitter eloquence; which appears in the spring and current of the scenes as they come following closely and easily one upon another. And yet we must perceive that both the facility and artifice and volubility are supported by sensitivity. Sensitivity prevents in the end the thing going wrong. Lenormand's play, for all the craft and theatre game of it, is alive with a sensitive response to those living and intense details by which the scenes are made up.

The story of *The Failures*, which is the title that for a lack of a better translation to be found in English, must stand, concerns a theme rather than any particular persons. The theme is of something that is like a force working in a group of people; in He, the poet and dramatist; Juliette, the actress; Montredon, the cynical and essentially distinguished director of an art theatre; old Madame Gueuroz, who had loved tragedy in her youth; Saint-Gallet, playing priests for thirty years; Larnaudy, loving glory and foolishly eaten out by it;

the foul-mouthed and sallow ingénue; and the musician, with his incorrigible music, his descent lower and lower, his assurance of his own genius even in filth. All these people are in some way doomed, born failures, down and out; all are marked for some final ruin and decay. And yet all are sensitive, open to life; all of them can be touched by life and can be destroyed by it. They are weak not because they love and follow the thing they are drawn to, Montredon to his art theatre, the composer to his music, He to his passion and art, Juliette to her love, not because they love and follow the thing that draws them, but because they cannot use these things toward their own strength. They cannot make life complete them even while it uses them up; they are not also nourished by what consumes them; they never convert into their own terms the forces that carry them. And so, as He, the poet, says at the end, it is only a question of time, they either kill the thing they love or it kills them.

In the midst of this group of people so pathetically and comically torn and wrecked by life, are Juliette and the poet. And because they are capable of a finer and more poignant response to beauty, to love and passion and ideas, they become the figures on which the story of the play is built. Through them, in spite of its destruction of them at last, a beautiful pure thing works. Love, beginning simply between the young author and his leading-lady, moves on through hunger and cold and through degradation and vice as a separate and pure thing. Love moves happily sometimes to the surface and once even into a serene and lovely mystery and peace; and it sinks into a dark and sullen power within; but whatever happens, love in these two creatures can be isolated; it is a pure thing, whether happy

and fresh or pitiful or brutal, or primitive or menacing. So that Lenormand has written a play about decay, failure and rottenness around the triumph of love. *Les Ratés* turns on the degradation and confusion and distortion and dirt of men's lives and the purity and power of the forces that move in them.

Some of the inventions and arrangements and themes of *Les Ratés* are obvious enough, most of the last scene, for instance, which is too easy and obvious. But many of these contrivances are remarkable. The scene in the cathedral is a wonderful motif, where the company pass by in twos sightseeing and break out with their several thoughts, and where He tells Juliette . . . who, when she could no longer bear the sight of his suffering and want, has sold herself . . . that he has followed a woman and gone with her, not because he wanted her but out of pride, his lost honour, as though going with a prostitute could give it back to him; not that either but because of some instinct that had led him to defile himself as Juliette had done, he wanted to be nearer to her, to be with her. Or take the profound theme, as Lenormand develops it, of the struggle in He's mind to rationalize and dominate his reaction to Juliette's selling herself to other men; it is for his sake, he tells himself; he does not experience, he says, the usual mystery that underlies all great forces and elements in us and in the universe about us. What carries and destroys these people in *The Failures* is in every case something that works at the heart of the individual, it begins and ends in shadow, it comes from without and fills them as the wind fills trees, and passes at length when they are finished and done with; and is no more to be explained than the forces of water, fire, gravitation. This is modern science and it is Greek.

And in this play the most powerful and profound instance of the employment of the motifs of such forces and elements is the way in which Lenormand works the theme of love in the two main persons, the poet and the woman he loves. In the first scenes this love appears in the midst of the irrelevancies of ordinary hours, the play, the rehearsal, the author's ménage. It continues through ecstasy, shame, dishonour and decay, through reasoning, debate and varieties of mental states and desperate resolutions and resorts, up to the very last indomitable primitive thing, the repressed but unavoidable element at the bottom of the man's passion. And this is brought to a brilliant and violent head through the introduction of the negro at the last, which carries the theme horribly and unforgettably to its last jungle essential.

STARK YOUNG

FAILURES

A PLAY IN FOURTEEN SCENES

CHARACTERS

HE

SHE

MONTREDON

THE MUSICIAN

LARNAUDY

SAINT-GALLET

MADAME GUEUROZ

THE INGENUE

THE SECOND PHANTOM

THE DRESSER

The Magistrate and His Daughter, the Librarian and His Wife, the Chemist, the Rake, the Corporal, the Private, the Hunch-back Girl, the Barmaid, M. Taurubour, the Commissioner of Police, the Negro.

FIRST SCENE

A dilapidated room used for rehearsals. A row of chairs against the wall. On the right a piano. On the left a table strewn with manuscripts and parts. In the centre, chairs set for a scene.

The curtain rises on MONTREDON *seated at the table.* HE *is beside him,* SHE *is in the rear.*

A tense expectancy holds all three silent.

[HE *takes out his watch.*]

MONTREDON

What's the time?

HE

Ten to four.

MONTREDON

My dear author, in view of the fact that the eminent artists who have been entrusted with the interpretation of your admirable work at the New Art Theatre, have arranged it amongst themselves to cut this rehearsal, I suggest that it be adjourned.

[HE *makes no answer but leaves his chair and paces nervously up and down the room.* MONTREDON *continues:*]

And in proposing this adjournment, I desire to express the utmost disapproval of your absent actors.

HE

[*Coming to a stop.*] Look here, Montredon, this can't go on. They're supposed to have been learning my play for two months, but they haven't rehearsed together once yet; and you expect to open on Monday!

MONTREDON

Yes, I am opening on Monday.

HE

[*Irascibly.*] I refuse to have my play ruined by these people you pick up in the streets.

MONTREDON

[*Sighing.*] The people I pick up in the streets would be quite all right if only they would turn up at rehearsals.

HE

I suppose you'll admit that a play can't be put on unless it has been rehearsed?

MONTREDON

In theory, no; in fact, yes.

HE

Well for once I'll go by theory.

MONTREDON

There's no need to get upset about it. We'll put in plenty of work the last three days, and your play will be done neither better nor worse than all the others I stage.

HE

But who will do it? Why, with the exception of you and our poor Juliet here who always arrives at 12.30, I haven't set eyes on an actor since I've been attending the rehearsals, not one. All I've seen is a procession of conceited asses who have mumbled their parts through once, maybe twice, and then vanished into thin air. What's the matter with them all? Why don't they come back? Is anything wrong with the play? Don't their parts suit them? Is it the symbolic aspect of the thing that scares them off? I can't understand it; it is completely beyond me.

MONTREDON

[*Reassuringly.*] No; it isn't the symbolic aspect.

HE

Then what is it? The only ones that have stuck to their parts are little bits of boys who make you blush to listen to them, they make so many blunders; and even they don't come. Why?

MONTREDON

[*Philosophically.*] For the very simple reason that they are at their movie work until three, and they are afraid to come after three because they know they'll be bawled out if they do. That's why.

HE

Then let the rehearsal be later.

MONTREDON

I can only have this place until half-past four.

HE

Very well, hire another place.

MONTREDON

What with, my dear fellow? You allow me 800 francs to do the whole thing on, remember.

HE

[*With a tightening of the throat.*] 800 francs! Those 800 francs represent two years' savings on French lessons at cut-rate. I'll never get so much together again for a play.

MONTREDON

Besides, you know perfectly well that it made me absolutely sick to have to ask you for more money. [*Rapping on the MS.*] This is good stuff, really it is, and if only I had a couple of thousand to put into it you'd see how it would go.

SHE

I asked my uncle for 500 but there was nothing doing.

HE

Suppose you read him the play?

SHE

And make him really angry? Incest, you know. . . .

HE

[*In a tone of finality.*] The thing would be to find some good actors who wouldn't stand out so much for the money. The idea of creating really good parts in a thing by a new man ought to appeal to them.

MONTREDON

It ought to . . . but they'd see it in hell first.

HE

Then what *are* we to do?

MONTREDON

Whip our 18-year olds up to scratch. I'll keep them at it day and night. . . .

HE

And my play will still be ruined. Well, I'm not going to have it, Montredon.

MONTREDON

[*To* SHE.] Did you ever see anyone so hopelessly young? [*To* HE.] But aren't *I* in your play? Isn't Juliet in it? What are you afraid of, for Heaven's sake?

HE

Excuse me, Montredon, but there are not only two parts, there are nine. And some of the scenes are very hard to manage, the one with the two phantoms, for instance.

MONTREDON

[*Through his teeth.*] Then cut that one; I asked you to before.

HE

No, No, No! I will *not* have my work mutilated because you can't put it on as it is. If you're coming

back again to that, let us cut it all out. I withdraw it —give me back my script.

MONTREDON

[*Calmly.*] How's that for temper?

HE

I am greatly disappointed in you, Montredon. I thought you were an artist, and sincere, and I find you so indifferent, so backboneless. . . . I thought the sacred flame burned in you, too, but I see I was mistaken.

MONTREDON

[*Bitterly.*] It used to, my boy; but it's a disease that does not last long; it either gets out of your system or you croak. You wait another ten years, then we'll see whether you still have it or not.

HE

Don't mind me, Montredon; my nerves are all on edge these days.

MONTREDON

[*Indulgently.*] Oh, that's all right; that's all right. . . .

[*The head of the Second Phantom is furtively thrust through the door in the rear. He is sixteen years of age, with an ingenuous manner and a slight squint.*]

SHE

Here's the Second Phantom.

MONTREDON

[*Pretending to scare him.*] Oh, it's you, is it, you young slacker. I must say I admire your nerve showing up at this hour. The rehearsal is over, my dear colleague, and if you think this is the way you're going to learn your job, you're making a mighty big mistake.

SECOND PHANTOM

[*So overcome with bashfulness that he can hardly speak.*] M. Montredon . . .

MONTREDON

Look at it, I ask you, standing there like a stalk of sick asparagus!

Well, now what's the trouble? Speak up, get it off your chest; let's hear you talk instead of mumbling that way. . . .

SECOND PHANTOM

M. Montredon; I have bad news for you. I have seen the First Phantom.

MONTREDON

And what about it? Pray where is the gentleman?

SECOND PHANTOM

He's at the café, M. Montredon.

MONTREDON

At the café, is he? Well you can go and tell him from me that he's a slacker, too.

SECOND PHANTOM

[*Taking a part out of his pocket.*] M. Montredon, he has given up his part.

MONTREDON

Who has he given it up to?

SECOND PHANTOM

To me, M. Montredon. He was afraid to give it back to you himself. He thinks the part is too small for him; he says he has played leads at Mostaganem, so he doesn't think it's worth his while to go on as a ghost. That's what he says.

MONTREDON

[*Banteringly.*] Dear me! I had no idea he had played leads at Mostaganem; that makes it altogether different of course; how absurd of me to offer him the part of a mere ghost! What do you think I ought to do about it? First of all you'd better go and tell him he isn't a slacker.

HE

There's nothing to laugh at, Montredon; it's simply appalling the way they are all throwing up their parts.

MONTREDON

Yes, and you can also tell him the author is simply appalled.

SECOND PHANTOM

[*Growing bolder.*] M. Montredon . . .

MONTREDON

Yes?

SECOND PHANTOM

As he has given up his part, won't you please let me have it?

HE

[*Protesting.*] No, no; certainly not.

MONTREDON

There you are, kid; the author can only see you as the Second Phantom, not as the First, so there's no more to be said about it.

SECOND PHANTOM

[*To* HE.] But I promise I'll work ever so hard, sir. You'll tell me what you want and I'll do everything you say. I have a friend who would play the Second Phantom instead of me.

MONTREDON

What does your friend look like?

SECOND PHANTOM

He's a bit fat for a ghost, but he has a marvellous deep voice.

MONTREDON

[*To* HIM.] How do you visualize your Second Phantom, fat or thin?

HE

I assure you, Montredon, I am in no mood for joking.

MONTREDON

[*Dreamily.*] I have always thought of him as a corpulent sort of a chap with chop-jaws and his hair nicely pasted down. [*To the* SECOND PHANTOM.] Bring your friend along, my boy.

SECOND PHANTOM

Then may I take the First Phantom, M. Montredon?

MONTREDON

We'll give you a try, kid.

SECOND PHANTOM

Oh, thank you, M. Montredon.

HE

[*Exceedingly annoyed.*] The ghosts have to create an impression of terror; this gentleman could never do that.

MONTREDON

You go ahead and work, now. Try and create whatever the author wants you to.

SECOND PHANTOM

Oh, yes M. Montredon; I will.

MONTREDON

To-morrow at half past one, with your friend.

SECOND PHANTOM

You can count on me, M. Montredon. [*He goes out.*]

HE

Montredon, don't let him take the First Phantom; he will be a perfect farce.

MONTREDON

He's not half bad, that boy. I jump on him just to keep him up to the mark, but I promise you he will be very good.

HE

Yes, but he could never be ter-ri-fy-ing.

MONTREDON

He is not the right build, maybe, but his face is all right. He's got a terrific left eye, that kid; didn't you notice it?

[SHE *laughs.*]

HE

[*Spreading his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.*] Oh, if you're going to laugh too . . .

[*The* MUSICIAN *enters with a roll of music under his arm. He is down at heel, but wears an expression of complete self-satisfaction.*]

MONTREDON

Hullo; here comes the orchestra.

HE

How do you do, my dear Crouzols? Well, how goes the incidental music, finished?

MUSICIAN

[*Delighted with himself.*] Yes, I have it here. As a

matter of fact, though, the public won't understand two bars of my score.

MONTREDON

Why not?

MUSICIAN

It is highly synthetic, you see; exceedingly synthetic.

MONTREDON

[*With foreboding glances at the others.*] Play us the procession for Act I, and let's see how it goes with my business.

MUSICIAN

[*Indifferently, sitting down at the piano.*] Oh, I didn't pay any attention to your business; I simply followed my own thought, you understand.

MONTREDON

Oh, hell!

[*The* MUSICIAN *begins to play a series of chords in ostentatious dissonance.*]

MONTREDON

[*Thinking, or pretending to think this is merely a preliminary running over the keyboard.*] Say, would you mind beginning, please? I am in rather a hurry.

MUSICIAN

[*Turning round in a rage, but without ceasing to play.*] But I have begun.

MONTREDON

Oh, I beg your pardon. [*He beckons to* HE *and* SHE *and the three confer in whispers. The* MUSICIAN *goes on playing, with thumps and discords which grow more and more unpleasant the farther he goes.*]

MONTREDON

[*With his watch in his hand.*] Halt!

MUSICIAN

[*Stopping.*] What do you mean; halt?

MONTREDON

Two minutes; the procession has passed.

MUSICIAN

But I haven't finished.

MONTREDON

Can't help that; the riders have gone out. The lovers are left behind alone.

MUSICIAN

[*Closing the piano with contemptuous indifference.*] If you don't like my music, you know, you needn't mind saying so.

HE

[*Hastily.*] Nonsense, Crouzols, of course we like it; it is simply a question of length.

MUSICIAN

Oh, I'm not going to make any cuts.

MONTREDON

In the first place, I have said all along that what I wanted at that point was a drum and nothing else. As for your music, well, I say, you know, I think it is . . . er . . .

MUSICIAN

You think it is . . .

MONTREDON

A bit too synthetic then, if you must know. And it isn't only my own opinion, either. The author thinks it's too synthetic, and even Juliet here . . . [SHE *turns away to hide a laugh.*]

MUSICIAN

You are trying to make a fool of me, is that it?

HE

No, no, Crouzols. Montredon doesn't know what he is talking about.

MONTREDON

Maybe not, but the composer does, I suppose, and he himself said "The music is too synthetic." Didn't he, Juliet?

HE

Nothing of the sort; Montredon is only trying to be funny.

MUSICIAN

[*Who has gathered up his score.*] Ten bars, and they

turn on me, the swine . . . queer . . . but it's quite right. That, after all, is what I am writing for.

HE

I am most awfully sorry, Crouzols, but you just don't understand.

MONTREDON

[*Aside.*] No, no; it's perfectly all right as it is.

MUSICIAN

You think you are knocking me, but instead you are only testifying to the absolute originality of my conceptions.

HE

Don't be angry, Crouzols.

MUSICIAN

Angry? I? How little you know me. On the contrary, I am delighted.

HE

Very well, then, please go on playing.

MUSICIAN

It's no use your hearing any more; my score gets more and more aggressive as it goes on.

HE

What if it does? I like your music ever so much.

MUSICIAN

Oh no you don't, dear boy. Don't make yourself out smarter than you are. At the present moment there are

two men living capable of understanding me . . . and they aren't here.

MONTREDON

Lucky brutes!

MUSICIAN

[*Unperturbed.*] One is in St. Petersburg and the other in Munich.

HE

[*Opening the piano again.*] Look here, Crouzols, please don't go away. We'll get on very well together if we try . . .

MUSICIAN

No. M. Montredon will want me to make cuts, and I am determined not to alter a single note. I can't help it if I respect my art; you people compromise with yours; you use all sorts of tricks, you pander to the public, and of course you have a perfect right to do so, but personally, I would sooner die than sacrifice one bar. The future will decide which of us is right.

MONTREDON

[*Sighing.*] The future . . . the future . . . there's nothing like talking glib about it.

MUSICIAN

[*To* HE.] Of course he must put his spoke in. I am unknown; I live in extreme poverty, and yet I have the utmost faith in myself. You haven't. The poison of doubt is already at work in you. You surely must real-

ise that we could never get on together. I wish you good afternoon. [*He goes out.*]

HE

[*To* MONTREDON.] There, thanks to you, goes our incidental music. Jolly, isn't it?

MONTREDON

You certainly ought to thank me. Why, a saucepan and a packing-case would be better than the ravings of that lunatic.

SHE

He is right. That music of Crouzol's is impossible.

HE

But it is music, anyway, and we must have some. Besides are we really fit to judge what it is worth? Some day, possibly, he may turn out to be the genius he believes he is now.

SHE

He? Why, he's the most out and out failure I ever met in my life!

HE

We don't know.

SHE

Yes we do; everybody knows that.

HE

Everybody might be wrong. Take Beethoven's later quartettes, for instance; for forty years . . .

MONTREDON

[*Rising.*] My children, as this conversation is becoming æsthetical, musical and argumentative, I guess I'll beat it.

HE

To-morrow then, at 1.30?

MONTREDON

[*Addressing imaginary actors.*] At 1.30 everybody. Rehearsal of crowds with costumes and properties. [*To* HE.] I'm going up to Belleville to try and find you a Prince Aldebert.

HE

[*In alarm.*] What's that? A Prince Aldebert? But we have one—that tall fellow who was here yesterday.

MONTREDON

He has dropped out.

HE

[*Furious.*] Another one? But what for? What in Heaven's name for?

MONTREDON

[*Portentously.*] On account of his mother.

HE

What's the matter with his mother?

MONTREDON

[*Holding out special delivery letter.*] Read it.

HE

[*Reads.*] "Dear Montredon, Please don't be very angry with me when you hear that it will be impossible for me to create the part of Prince Aldebert in your play. On re-reading the script, I realise that my mother, who is rabid on morals, would never forgive me if I acted the part of an old man in love with his own daughter."

This is awful. We can't have just anyone for Prince Aldebert; he must look the part.

MONTREDON

[*Soothingly.*] I have someone in view.

HE

Thirteen years old, I suppose. No, it's got to be a real old man, otherwise his whole scene will be a wash-out.

MONTREDON

My dear chap, you'll be surprised when I tell you who it is I'm going to see now. An absolute Abdul-Hamid, my boy.

HE

[*Immediately overjoyed.*] Oh, that would be wonderful.

MONTREDON

[*Restraining him.*] Yes, if he is free. Right-oh; see you to-morrow. So long, Juliet.

SHE

Good-bye, Montredon. [*Montredon hurries out.*] You poor boy.

HE

This fighting does take it out of one, you know. You never know how to take Montredon; and it is useless to get angry with a man like him.

SHE

Especially because at heart he takes all this very seriously; he goes to no end of trouble with it. He is an artist after all.

HE

Pshaw! Do you honestly believe that?

SHE

I am certain of it.

HE

All the spirit seems to have gone out of him.

SHE

What do you expect after keeping up a losing battle for fifteen years? Anyone would be disheartened; why, even we ourselves in a few years' time. . . .

HE

[*A trifle self-consciously.*] Oh, no . . . I don't believe I shall ever become disheartened. Reality is what discourages a man; having to endure one set-back after another, with facts hitting you in the face all the time. But that reality should not exist for the artist; he ought to possess another, beyond the reach of circumstance, and for which he alone should be responsible.

SHE

Yes, that would be splendid; if one had the strength of character to do it.

HE

[*Somewhat rhetorically.*] Every artist needs to keep within himself a silent place where the struggle shall be with himself alone, and where the breaking waves of failure and success cease to affront his ears with their roar.

What matter that I am poor and unknown if I am king in the country of my dreams where all is great, all perfect?

SHE

It warms my heart to hear you talk that way. You are so often uncertain of yourself.

HE

I shall never be that any more; I am not going to allow myself to be poisoned by doubt, as Crouzols said. I will break that habit of stopping continually to appraise my work; it is too futile. From now on, I will do nothing but create. Upon the ocean of human stupidity I will launch the mighty ships of my dreams, with their shining sails, and if only I have strength to build them, I promise you they will be seaworthy enough. In the end they could not help but . . . [*He stops suddenly and laughs.*]

SHE

What were you going to say? What are you laughing at?

HE

I am laughing because I might be Crouzols talking. He also imagines that. . . .

SHE

[*Vehemently.*] No comparisons,—please. You have a right to believe in yourself—it is your duty. Ah, how good it must be to believe in oneself a little. . . .

HE

You have no more right to disbelieve in yourself than I.

SHE

But when these spells of enthusiasm come over me so that I imagine myself capable of all sorts of great things, the thought that I may be simply fooling myself always comes and spoils it all.

HE

You must not think such things. Why, when we are here together, just you and I, and you go over your part for me, do I not weep?

SHE

Oh, that doesn't prove anything.

HE

Doesn't it; why?

SHE

[*Shyly.*] When I am all alone at home in the evenings, I read your poems over and over, and I also cry; that doesn't prove that they are good.

HE

[*Thinking.*] You mean . . . it proves something else?

SHE

[*In a low voice.*] Yes.

HE

[*In the same tone.*] Something . . . that means more happiness to me than all these other things. You know. . . . [*He takes her hand slowly, and tenderly presses it.*]

SHE

It makes me happy too.

HE

Something . . . and it is enough for me.

CURTAIN

SECOND SCENE

A room on the Boulevard du Montparnasse. The bed is hidden by a screen. A table littered with books and papers. Time: An afternoon in autumn.

HE *is sitting at the table with his head in his hands, thinking.*

SHE *looks in, at right.*

HE

You may come in.

SHE

[*Enters.*] I was afraid of disturbing you.

HE

Oh, I'm not working.

SHE

Should I ask Montredon to have something when he comes presently?

HE

No. It's just a business call; he isn't coming as a friend. He's a queer sort of friend, anyway, letting us alone like this for two solid years.

SHE

He must be dreadfully up against it; think of having to give up his theatre and run around the provinces.

HE

I wonder what this thing is he wants to offer you.

SHE

Some tour or other; nothing much, I'm sure. Never mind, I shall accept it whatever it is.

HE

Why should you?

SHE

Because, darling, it is six months since I opened my mouth in Paris. The managers have obviously had enough of me, and between ourselves, they are quite right. It is a good while now since I learnt to see myself as others see me.

HE

Nothing of the kind; you don't see yourself at all. Just because you came down badly in one idiotic play, you think that is the end of you. Why, it is simply childish, you know.

SHE

Is it! They didn't take care to inform me that I had no talent, did they, or that I was monotonous and wooden and dragged my lines, and so on. . . .

HE

You spend all your time raking over those bad notices! Everybody gets some sooner or later; it's nothing to feel discouraged about.

SHE

Well, please don't let's get on to that subject again. I know exactly where I stand. Is your work going well to-day?

HE

[*Evasively.*] No, not too well.

SHE

What's wrong?

HE

Oh, it would take too long to explain.

SHE

The reason's perfectly obvious. It is two years now since you have been played anywhere, and you ought positively to be able to get some idea of what you are writing.

HE

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Yes, I ought to be able to do that . . . and other things.

SHE

You blame *me* for being downhearted, and you yourself, the very next minute . . .

HE

That is altogether different. Your failure was a pure accident and had nothing to do with you personally, while I . . . well, I am perfectly aware of the slope I am going down. I did have some talent once; for a

year or so. Then it left me. For no reason I grew colourless and cold; there is no glow or life to any of the stuff I write nowadays. I have become a literary person like all the rest of them.

SHE

You are going through a bad spell, that's all. You are tired; you work too hard.

HE

[*Smiling bitterly.*] I haven't written ten pages this whole month.

SHE

Oh! If only you didn't have to give those awful lessons for a living, I am sure . . .

HE

[*Pacing the room.*] Now, now! Four hours' lessons a day are hardly an impediment to genius like mine. No, my dear; this mental drying-up has no cause outside my own self. What's more, I don't take it in the least seriously; on the contrary; there are moments when I am rather relieved to think I am not a great artist. I don't want to be one of these creators who wall themselves up in their art like a tomb, and for whom not one thing exists outside their sacrosanct function of assembling words, and more words, for ever and ever, without rest, until they have rotted away. My life has more freedom and meaning than if I belonged to that breed; I can live more amply. I prefer to be just an ordinary man, for there are, after all, other things in life besides art.

SHE

For you? I am not so sure.

HE

For me the same as for everybody else. It is only the truly great whom art can entirely suffice, because they only can yield themselves up to her, body and soul. Other men's desires go further, and as for me, I feel my own aspirations go out towards some broader horizon.

SHE

[*Gazing at him intently.*] I have not yet found out what it is you do demand of life.

HE

[*Ceasing to walk up and down.*] Nor have I.

SHE

It worries me; a lot.

HE

[*Absorbed in his thoughts.*] Yet it is very clear to me that the riddle is waiting to be solved. There is a key-word, a truth, by which alone we can solve it, and though it elude us all the while, we may not give up its pursuit, for we will never know real peace until we have found it.

SHE

Which word, darling, which truth?

HE

[*Staring at the floor.*] How should I know? After

all these years I am looking for it still. When I was eighteen, it seemed to me that I should find the answer in this country or that city; it was a stupid idea of course —however I pinched and scraped to save travelling money out of my salary, and off I went. I might have known that the only revelation I should meet would be in the way of forms and colours, and it was; so I came home more eager and more fretful than before. Now and then would come moments when I would tell myself there was nothing to look for and nothing to find, beyond our own sheer restlessness.

SHE

Oh, no! That would be too horrible!

HE

Yes, wouldn't it? Imagine doing the same things and saying the same words like machines day after day without ever knowing why! If that were all a man could get out of life, well . . .

SHE

[*In a low, eager voice.*] There is something else; there must be. . . . [*Pensively.*] But it is perhaps not a truth, as you call it, nor any explanation that the mind could grasp.

HE

What do *you* think it is, then?

SHE

It might be a way of feeling; a certain manner of loving.

HE

Love cannot give me the solution I need.

SHE

It seems to me that if you loved me more, you would not worry so much.

HE

[*In surprise.*] Don't I love you?

SHE

You have not much heart, darling. You are all head. . . .

HE

I think I love you pretty well.

SHE

[*Smiling.*] You do; as much as you are capable of.

HE

Besides . . . that has nothing to do with it.

SHE

Don't say that. When one is caught up and submerged in a great passion, one has no thought left for introspection and endless worrying over abstractions. There are no more riddles and no more questions; all that rubbish is simply swept away.

HE

Yes, but afterwards?

SHE

Afterwards? What do you mean?

HE

The anxiety is bound to return, so are the questions; in fact, all the rubbish as you call it. [*The bell rings.*]

SHE

There's Montredon.

HE

I'll go. [*Exit right and returns with a Montredon grown sadly older.*]

MONTREDON

Good-evening, children.

SHE

Good-evening, Montredon, how do you do?

MONTREDON

[*With smiling bitterness, as he sits down.*] Why, I do brilliantly, as you see. I am now organizing the Fontenelle tours. I am his general manager; enormous responsibility and noble artistic results!

HE

It *was* bad luck your having to give up your own theatre.

SHE

We were very sad to see it go.

MONTREDON

What did you expect? It was an art theatre.

HE

How is it they didn't stand by you? You had backers. . . .

MONTREDON

Yes, but the backing gave out; so then the backers made me bankrupt.

HE

Your authors shouldn't have deserted you the way they did.

MONTREDON

Oh, they didn't want to desert me; they wanted to chuck me into prison.

HE

Good Lord! Whatever for?

MONTREDON

Pooh! Cash as usual; old contracts, scraps of paper. As a matter of fact, they never forgave me the good turns I did them; because I did at least put their plays on—[*correcting himself*] most of them. And as for those I didn't put on, why, that was a good turn too.

SHE

[*Halfheartedly.*] What an ungrateful lot they are!

HE

[*Politely.*] Sickening, isn't it?

MONTREDON

Well, that's that! I am disgusted, children; fed-up. The human species makes me ill. You know what I'm

like in business, don't you? As tactful and straightforward as any man, so naturally they choked the life out of me as though I had been the biggest rotter on earth. Sheriffs, protests, seizures, attachments of personal effects; I've been through the whole mess. [*He half pulls out of his pocket a bunch of summonses.*] Look at them; my pockets are stuffed with blue papers still! [*He gives a short and bitter laugh, and brings his hand heavily down upon* HE's *shoulder.*] And how about you, master? Still true to high art?

HE

I go on working.

MONTREDON

[*With sardonic gaiety.*] Well, I've found a pretty good pitch in the mud; it really doesn't smell quite as bad as they say. . . . Come on, Juliet, I invite you to come and share my mud-bath with me; get ready now, brace up!

SHE

What is it, Montredon?

MONTREDON

Fontenelle's grand winter circuit. Six months, four plays, 175 towns. Wait, here's the itinerary. [*He pulls out a summons by mistake.*] More blue papers! [*Takes out another paper.*] Here it is. . . .

SHE

[*Examining it.*] Six months' travelling round—that is an awfully tiring proposition.

HE

I know her; she will get disgusted with the tour and cave in at the end of the first month.

MONTREDON

[*Taking out a contract.*] Two thousand in hard cash; she won't cave in. You go along with her; that will cheer her up.

HE

It would also mean giving up my teaching, and we have nothing else to live on.

MONTREDON

[*Caustically.*] On Fontenelle's pay you will be able to live like kings, both of you.

SHE

How much does he pay?

MONTREDON

[*In the same tone.*] 20 francs a show; travelling expenses paid second class.

SHE

Starvation, isn't it?

MONTREDON

All the same, Juliet, you would be making a great mistake to refuse it. Will you tell me where you have played these last two years?

SHE

I have played in the new-art theatres.

MONTREDON

They don't count, my dear; I know all about them; I ran one myself.

SHE

I've given up wanting to be famous.

HE

[*With a wry smile.*] Yes, we have renounced celebrity.

MONTREDON

Same here. But we were talking shop. . . . You are getting rusty here, while by playing before a different audience every day . . .

SHE

[*Sighing.*] Always the same plays.

HE

[*Studying the itinerary.*] And *what* plays!

MONTREDON

You try and feed Ibsen to the inhabitants of Elbeuf and Issoudun, and see how you get on! Not a snowball's chance in hell, old chap!

HE

I know . . . I know.

[*A pause.*]

MONTREDON

[*Ironic again.*] Come, Juliet; sign this "pact of infamy" as they say in the Fontenelle repertory. [*Holding the contract out to her.*]

SHE

Leave it with me; I'll think it over.

MONTREDON

[*To* HE.] Try and get her to make up her mind, won't you?

SHE

Who are the rest of the cast?

MONTREDON

Oh, awfully talented crowd; you surely don't doubt that, do you. There's Saint-Gallet who played at my own place once upon a time.

SHE

The eternal priest? Yes, I know him.

MONTREDON

And a little ingénue, a foul-mouthed young baggage, and a bit sallow in the face, but she'll take down south. And then we have Larnaudy.

SHE

Never heard of him.

MONTREDON

What? Never heard of Larnaudy? But, my dear girl, he's the pride of the provinces! [*Catches sight of a book on the table.*] I see you have the Artists' Almanach; his mug and biography are both in it; let's look 'em up and you'll see if he isn't no end of a fellow. [*Turns pages.*] L . . . L . . . Larnaudy; oh, here he

is. [*They look at the photo while Montredon reads*:] "An officer of the Academy since 1889, this well-known actor has appeared with success at most of the theatres in France and the colonies. He has been successively attached to the municipal theatres of Rouen, Narbonne, Caen, Roubaix, Limoges and Montluçon, where he was re-engaged for six consecutive years, at the instance of his audiences. His magnificent presence, his natural distinction, and the purity of his diction, combine to make him the ideal interpreter of heroic rôles. He has played in the Three Musketeers over 1500 times and with ever-increasing success. His brilliant career and splendid gifts render him peculiarly fitted to undertake the direction of a large theatre in Paris, which, if rumour is to be credited, he will not be long in doing."

How's that, eh? Didn't I tell you he was a regular fellow?

SHE

It's not a laughing matter, Montredon; I should cry, rather.

MONTREDON

[*Still going through the book.*] See this fat one in the peplum, she's old Gueuroz, another member of the circuit.

SHE

What, is that poor old thing still playing?

HE

I thought she'd been dead about ten years.

MONTREDON

She's at the zenith of her powers! You'll see; listen to this: [*Reads.*] "This noble tragedienne made her début at the Trocadero in Phèdre, with Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, and achieved such notable success that she was immediately recommended for an engagement at the Comédie Française.

"Who shall explain the sequel? Nobody has yet come forward with a solution of the mystery. All we know is that her lofty principles forbade Madame Gueuroz to submit to certain degrading requirements made of her, and her great merit alone was not enough to open to her the doors of that theatre. But she need not go unconsoled, for we have yet to hear of a provincial theatre where she has failed to capture her audience completely. 'To have seen her in Horace,' writes M. Lapomme, in the Cantal Petit Echo, 'is to realise her rank. As Camille her scenes of violence were the very model of the genre of acting; fear chills the heart at her aspect; her audience trembles, weeps, shudders with her, and all but echoes the accents of her passionate denunciations. Indeed one wonders what is keeping the Parisian managers from enlisting the services of an artist whose talents cover so remarkable a range.' Let us reassure the distinguished critic: once more, and more urgently than ever, the question of appointing Mme. Gueuroz to the Comédie Française is being discussed. There and there only will she find a place worthy of her great gifts and excellent heart."

Poor old dear!

HE

Shocking, isn't it?

SHE

I should die of shame if I read such stuff about myself.

MONTREDON

Oh, I think it's rather a joke.

HE

[*Pointing to the book.*] Are you also in it?

MONTREDON

[*Going through it again.*] Certainly I am; why not? [*Reads.*] "Montredon, the celebrated founder and director of the National Art Theatre, made a brilliant début at the Bouffes-du-Nord. An inextinguishable belief in his vocation, and a dauntless tenacity were the weapons with which he ventured forth to the conquest of fame. . . . [*He stops and closes the book.*] It's funny, you know, but to-day the humour seems to have gone out of it somehow. . . .

CURTAIN

THIRD SCENE

A hotel bed-room. 11 *o'clock in the morning.*

HE

[*Scribbling figures on a piece of paper.*] The rest of your month's pay, 25, plus 31 of mine, makes 56. And to-day is the 27th.

SHE

I can't ask for any more on account until the 15th of next month.

HE

We can't live on 56 francs for eighteen days; it won't even cover our rent.

SHE

Saint-Gallet was telling us that last year when he was with the Baret stock, he used to sleep in the theatres. He gave passes to the stage-hands and they put a mattress in his room; he saved himself hotel expenses that way.

HE

And do you think I would let you sleep in those stinking holes on a mattress for the company to make a by-word and a joke of you?

SHE

But, darling, seeing that we have no more money. . . .

HE

I will get some; I will try and get some. In another week we go on to Bar-le-duc, don't we?

SHE

Yes.

HE

Did I ever tell you about Raymond?

SHE

No.

HE

He is one of my old class-mates. He lives at Bar-le-Duc; I'll look him up. If he can't help us, why, I don't know what will happen.

SHE

Don't worry, my dearest.

HE

You are very lighthearted about it; so am I for that matter. But it was easy to foresee that we would come to this.

SHE

We did foresee it.

HE

Yes; that's just where the absurdity comes in. We knew that if I came with you we should run out of everything in two months, but you made me come all the same.

SHE

I couldn't have faced this alone.

HE

Imagination! But there is another thing you forget to mention; perhaps you aren't even aware of it.

SHE

And that is . . .

HE

Our present state. You not only foresaw it, but expected, in fact, I believe you looked forward to it. . . .

SHE

I don't see where it is so terrible, really. I'm not afraid of poverty.

HE

Because you have never experienced it. If you ever watched a plant grow, you must have noticed how naïvely it stretches upwards towards the highest heavens, fighting for all the air and light it can possibly get. Every living thing reaches out towards joy; but in you some dark instinct always seems to be pulling you away, as though you dread it; you seem drawn towards sorrow as if by some secret inner power. You want to suffer; there is a dull kind of hunger in your heart which misfortune alone seems able to satisfy.

SHE

Is there nothing *you* desire? Don't you long for anything?

HE

Not for suffering; I don't carry foolishness quite to that extreme.

SHE

[*Pensively.*] Who knows the power of suffering?

HE

[*Smiling.*] Problems of that sort become absolutely devoid of interest before the fact that we have to subsist for two whole weeks on 56 francs.

SHE

[*Following her thought.*] Maybe there is a kind of happiness which can only be born of suffering.

HE

What difference can it make whether we are happy or unhappy? You always think reality is in feelings; it isn't, it is in facts, and nothing but facts. And the present fact is that we possess [*scribbling*] not quite four francs a day, when the absolute minimum is twenty. Outside these figures nothing whatever exists for us.

SHE

You are wrong, my dear. I feel that something else does exist; something that throws off the yoke of your reality, tramples it underfoot, laughs at it.

HE

[*Smiling.*] I wish I knew what it was.

SHE

[*In a low voice, struggling with the darning of a black glove.*] It is within ourselves, ever so deep down and small; so newly born that it has not yet even a name. But for these hardships of ours, it might never have been born at all. When I was a child, you know, there was a song which always used to soothe me; I don't know why, for it was such a silly little thing. Well, the thing I mean is like that song; it starts singing inside me every now and then all of a sudden, and the bleakest, saddest day lights up with its music. Maybe you don't understand. . . .

HE

[*Gravely.*] Yes, I think I do.

SHE

That is our song; haven't you ever heard it? There's nothing to it, just like the other. I think it takes a woman to hear it. You are different; you are afraid of poverty; you watch it coming and go over all the details of it in your mind. And soon, with all your worries and privations, you will cease to love me. . . .

HE

[*Moved.*] Juliet!

SHE

Whilst I . . . isn't it strange how little we know our own hearts? I thought I loved you before.

HE

And didn't you?

SHE

I don't know whether any woman can love a happy man; a woman who has never felt a little pity for the man she loves has probably never known what true love is.

HE

Is that what your song says to you?

SHE

That is why you never could hear it. The day you feel sorry for me, you will cease to love me.

HE

[*Gently.*] No, Juliet, oh, no!

SHE

[*Keeping back her tears.*] Oh, yes! Every time my face looks ugly and haggard from lack of sleep, you love me a little less; I noticed it long ago. And when we come down to real poverty, when I shall have only one dress left and that one all worn out, and no more perfumes and no more laces, you will look at me with that expression of cold curiosity I have come to know so well, and sigh for the girl I used to be.

HE

That is not true, Juliet. You are entirely mistaken; and the proof of it is that there are sometimes pitiful, awkward little things about you that move me—oh, I know it's stupid and all that—but they move me to tears. [*He picks up the glove which she has just laid*

on the table.] These holey gloves, for instance, that you never manage to mend, however hard you try.

SHE

[*Kissing him.*] My dear, my dearest love!

CURTAIN

FOURTH SCENE

A low-ceilinged hotel bed-room. Five o'clock in the evening. A bell-boy enters, carrying a suit-case. HE *and* SHE *follow him.*

HE

How much is this one?

BOY

Three francs.

HE

Have you nothing on the top floor?

BOY

This is the top floor.

HE

Very well; you can put those things down.

BOY

Dinner is at seven.

HE

Thank you.

BOY

Shall I have two places set at the table?

HE

[*Embarrassed.*] We shall not be wanting dinner this evening.

BOY

You can eat à la carte if you like.

SHE

We have already dined.

BOY

Oh!

HE

I ate on the train; and my wife . . . my wife never takes anything before she has to play.

BOY

Well, I may as well tell you; if you don't board, the landlord raises the price of the room.

SHE

How do you mean?

BOY

[*Pointing to a notice.*] Here you are; they tell you.

HE

How much extra do they charge?

BOY

Fifty centimes each.

HE

[*Reading the notice.*] Very well. We have had dinner.

BOY

Do you want to be called to-morrow?

HE

Yes please, at six o'clock sharp.

BOY

Yes, sir. [*He goes out.*]

HE

Have you still a roll left over from this morning?

SHE

Yes darling; there's bread and chocolates and mint pastilles.

HE

Go ahead, then; you must be hungry.

SHE

I'm not a bit though. Funny, isn't it? You go down now and order something hot for yourself.

HE

Indeed not!

SHE

You promised you would.

HE

But I'm not hungry either.

SHE

You might at least take some soup.

HE

I'm not hungry, I tell you. Besides I must go and hunt up Raymond. [*Knock at the door.*] Come in!

SHE

Why, it's Larnaudy!

[LARNAUDY *enters. He is a typical provincial actor, fifty years of age, well preserved and fond of the sound of his own voice.*]

LARNAUDY

Good evening, children. What do you think? Saumadieu has had one of his fits and has just fallen downstairs.

SHE

Oh, poor man! [*Goes towards the door.*]

LARNAUDY

No use your going; a doctor is already there. In any case, there's nothing to do but let it take its course. This is the third time in two years I've seen him fall down; I'm used to it.

SHE

Won't he be able to play this evening?

LARNAUDY

[*Trying to keep the satisfaction out of his voice.*]

Out of the question! I am to take his part. Oh, it doesn't worry me; I know it, I know them all. All I need is to go over one or two bits with you.

SHE

Whenever you like.

LARNAUDY

Now, then, if it wouldn't be disturbing you.

SHE

Yes, come on.

LARNAUDY

[*To* HE, *taking a paper-backed play out of his pocket.*] You prompt. [*Arranging the table and two chairs.*] Poor old Saumadieu; he is hopeless in this part. Not his line at all. But it is just right for me; I played it three years ago in Cairo. After the show his Highness the Khedive summoned me into his presence, and said "My dear artist, allow me to express. . . ."

HE

[*Interrupting.*] Where do you start from?

LARNAUDY

Act II, Scene IV.

HE

Please begin; I'm rather in a hurry; I have to go out.

LARNAUDY

All right, all right. [*To* SHE.] You are on. The captain says to you: "You were a soldier's daughter,

and sister of three soldiers more; three soldiers, I say, though but two of them yet live. Now neither father nor brothers shall be yours for evermore." [*To* HE.] Have you found the place?

HE

[*Mechanically reading the cues.*] And no sister shall be yours. Yes, I still have one, the nurse, she is enough. A truce to words, let us come to the table. Not yet. . . . Are you expecting a guest? No, an emissary of justice!

LARNAUDY

She crosses and I enter. [*He comes forward and declaims in a conventional tone, as though dealing out destinies with every word.*] Approach! Never shall it be said that General Marquis de la Rocheflambée, though enfeebled with years and passed into retirement, gave by his silence consent to. . . . [*To* HE.] What do I give consent to?

HE

[*Prompting.*] An act of dishonour.

LARNAUDY

An act of dishonour. This union would be most horrible, evil beyond words. One does not surrender one's daughter to the hereditary foe of one's house, while in one's heart one yet wears uniform and sabre!

SHE

Father!

LARNAUDY

[*Through his teeth.*] Twice!

SHE

Father!

LARNAUDY

Look at me; straight in the eyes.

SHE

I am, father.

LARNAUDY

Lay your hand upon your conscience.

SHE

It lies there, father.

LARNAUDY

Tell me now if this fatal love has never revolted your soul. [*Through his teeth.*] You cross here.

SHE

[*Moving away.*] Father, with my eyes on yours and my hand upon my conscience. . . .

LARNAUDY

[*Through his teeth.*] Come to your cue.

SHE

Which alone can triumph over frontiers.

LARNAUDY

At last I recognise my own flesh and blood. Sit you

down and let us share this family repast. [*To* HE.] Couldn't you put some food on the table?

SHE

[*To* HE.] Take the things out of the bag, darling.

LARNAUDY

It's hard to do a dinner without properties.

HE

[*Puts on the table a roll and a few pieces of chocolate which he has taken out of the bag.*] There you are.

LARNAUDY

Thanks. "Let me help you, daughter." [*He breaks the roll, doles himself out a half, and several of the chocolates. He makes the gesture of serving* SHE, *but gives her nothing.* [*Aside.*] And we eat. [*She pretends to eat while he devours the bread and chocolate.*]

SHE

This game is exquisite.

LARNAUDY

[*Eating.*] It is the product of La Rocheflambée's secular forests. It is French as all is, here. And this ancient domain, these riches held in such bitter strife against the younger branch, are what you would abandon to a stranger lord? A criminal folly!

SHE

Father, I will endeavour to thrust down all love that stirs my heart except the love of country. I will strive to change my inmost being.

LARNAUDY

Thank God, I hear my own flesh and blood speaking at last. Will you take another wing, dear Gertrude?

HE

That isn't in the text.

LARNAUDY

I know; I put it in for padding. [*He pretends to serve her once again, gives himself the other half of the roll and the rest of the chocolate and eats them greedily. She makes a pretence of cutting her meat and eating it.*] And now, set my mind truly at rest: promise me that if war does come, you will follow the example of your sister and go as canteen-helper.

HE

[*Prompting.*] Nurse.

LARNAUDY

Go as nurse.

SHE

I promise!

LARNAUDY

[*To* HE, *through his teeth.*] You be the cannon. . . . Thank God, the war is still far off!

HE

[*Reading off-handedly.*] Boom! Boom! Boom!!

LARNAUDY

[*Rising.*] It is here now.

SHE

[*Also rising.*] What?

LARNAUDY

Those cannon-shots. . . . War is declared!

SHE

I go! I hasten whither duty calls me!

LARNAUDY

[*Embracing her with his mouth full.*] My child! My heroine! The second!

SHE

But you, father, what will you do?

LARNAUDY

[*Grandiosely, finishing the chocolate.*] I shall remain where honour awaits me; I shall immure myself in this manor and whet the edge of my old sword. If the brigands force a way to my retreat, pass they must, but it will be over my dead body!

SHE

Oh, father, how terrible you are.

LARNAUDY

[*Annoyed.*] Not so fast! There's an effect there! Give them a chance to applaud, for Heaven's sake! Let's have that bit over again. "Over my dead body!" [*He raises his hand for the possible duration of the applause, then signs to her to go on.*]

SHE

Oh, father, how terrible you are! If only I were a man, that I might avenge you!

LARNAUDY

They have not got me yet, the cowards! I shall show them that the Marquis de la Rocheflambée is an old goat. . . .

HE

[*Prompting.*] An old stag. . . .

LARNAUDY

Is an old stag, who, though hunted, pursued and hemmed in on every side, can keep them all at bay!

CURTAIN

FIFTH SCENE

A dressing-room in a provincial theatre. SHE, *sitting at a table on the right, is putting a final touch to her make-up. The mirror is cracked; the wash-basin is of tin. Her trunk, covered with railway labels, stands in the rear, and the dresser, an aged woman, wearing the caraco of a bygone fashion, is bending over it looking out her things. Somebody is heard in the corridor ringing a bell and calling out indistinctly "Ten minutes more . . . ten minutes more."*

SHE

How long does he say?

DRESSER

Ten minutes; and they don't like to be kept waiting at Bar-le-Duc.

SHE

Can't you find the cloak? It is in the tray.

DRESSER

[*Pulling out a cloak.*] This rag?

SHE

Yes. Thank you.

DRESSER

[*Inspecting it.*] Not very clean.

SHE

[*Uneasily.*] Well the tour has lasted three months, you know.

DRESSER

It ain't silk, or even satin: just muslin. And all mended up.

SHE

On purpose. In the first act, I play the part of a poor girl.

DRESSER

A bad part, child. A cloak like that might take very badly in this place.

SHE

[*Alarmed.*] Really?

DRESSER

It's a well-to-do town, is Bar-le-Duc; and they like well-to-do artists. They don't make no allowances here! They're connoisseurs, they are! On first nights they come to the theatre with double whistles.

SHE

But I'm taking the part of a poor girl; I can't go on dressed like a duchess.

DRESSER

Why not? At Bar-le-Duc they like the togs. Do you know why the last company didn't make any money? Because they all played labourers. The people here don't want to be bothered going to see labourers, and

why should they? The factories are full of that kind. If I'd been you I'd have bought a new cloak for the show to-night.

SHE

I couldn't possibly.

DRESSER

[*Watching her closely.*] Oh! If you weren't so proud, I might have an idea for you.

SHE

For me?

DRESSER

Yes. They're a well-to-do lot at Bar-le-Duc, and fond of the theatre, take my word for it. More than one connoisseur would ask nothing better than to help a pretty little dear like you.

SHE

Oh!

DRESSER

They're very well-to-do, the Bar-le-Duc men. Five louis is no more to them than five sous to you and me. [*Coming nearer.*] There's one that likes you; he told me so just now. If you'd see him a minute before you go on, maybe you could arrange something, eh?

[SHE *sits with her elbows on the dressing table, her face in her hands.* HE *enters, wearing a threadbare summer overcoat.*]

HE

Hullo, darling!

SHE

Well, did you find your friend?

HE

[*In utter dejection.*] No . . . he has gone away.

SHE

This is awful.

HE

They think he is in Paris.

SHE

What ever shall we do? [*He makes a helpless gesture and sits down.*] How tired you look.

HE

I am.

[*A long pause.*]

DRESSER

And you can't be too warm with only that thin coat on.

SHE

Don't stay in the theatre to-night, darling.

HE

Don't you want me to go and sit in front?

SHE

No.

HE

Why not? This is the first time you . . .

SHE

I feel I'm not going to do well to-night.

HE

I can wait for you here, then.

SHE

No, please go back to the hotel and rest. I'll go back by myself. [*The* DRESSER *goes furtively out.*]

HE

All right, if you'd rather. [HE *rises and moves towards the door.*]

SHE

Aren't you going to kiss me? [HE *kisses her; she clings to him, sobbing.*]

HE

Come, dear, don't cry. It isn't possible that we shouldn't be able to raise some money somehow. Something's got to happen.

SHE

[*In tears.*] She told me just now, that dresser, that my cloak was too old for the theatre.

HE

She only said that to make you feel bad; don't you believe her.

SHE

But what about you? You haven't even an overcoat;

I know you are cold in that thing. And then you say "Something's got to happen." How can it?

HE

I'll think it over and see if I can't hit on a way out. Don't be downhearted, dear. [He *goes out. The* DRESSER *comes back.*]

DRESSER

Crying, are we? Look at all your make-up running! How are you going to play gay in a minute when you go on, dearie?

SHE

[*Drying her eyes.*] It isn't a gay part.

DRESSER

[*Jovially.*] That's nothing; you have to be gay all the same. You must play gay here, specially in the sad parts. They pay to have their fun and they see they get it. They know a tragedy when they see one, but they go on laughing just the same so as to make sure they're getting their money's worth. [SHE *smiles.*] That's the girl! Now we're all cheered up. [*In a confidential whisper.*] Listen, dearie, the gentleman is here; shall I bring him in? [*A tremor of repugnance passes over* SHE.] Ah! I know a little woman who won't be hard up to-morrow for a silk cloak if she wants one, or a real warm overcoat for her good husband either! Well, is it all right? Can I say you'll see him?

SHE

Let him come in.

[*The* DRESSER *goes to the door.* SHE *rises and stands with her back to the dressing-table, profoundly troubled, her eyes fixed on the floor.*]

DRESSER

[*In the doorway, about to disappear.*] Step inside, Monsieur Taurubour.

CURTAIN

SIXTH SCENE

The same room as in the fourth scene. Three o'clock in the morning. SHE *is lying on a couch, half undressed, with her hair down. She is weeping.* HE *is standing beside her; he is wearing his overcoat over his shirt-sleeves.*

HE

Come now, you have cried enough. If you don't stop you won't be able to sleep at all. The train leaves at seven, so we have only three hours left, anyway. Go to bed now. . . . [SHE *sobs.*] Do be sensible. If you make yourself ill and give yourself a splitting headache for two days, will that alter anything whatever? Whether you cry or sleep, nothing of this can ever be undone. [SHE *sobs still more violently.*] No, no; that isn't what I wanted to say; I didn't mean to hurt you. It was stupid of me; I only said it for the sake of saying something. Look here, Juliet, I have forgiven you, so why all this despair?

SHE

I don't want you to forgive me.

HE

Then what do you want me to do? Call you names? Beat you? My dear child . . .

SHE

Promise me, anyhow, that you don't forgive me because you don't care any more.

HE

As if I could have stopped caring any more at five minutes' notice just because you have said certain words to me. In the first place, nothing ever happens the way you expect it to.

SHE

That is true. Nothing does happen the way you expect it to.

HE

I ought to hate you and despise myself, but I don't at all. And I don't believe I am so different from other men; not much more of a coward or much less sensitive, but somehow I am not experiencing any of the feelings they classify and catalogue for these occasions. I wonder if shame and jealousy and anger really exist or whether they are merely words. Are there men who have really known what shame is? And if so, are those men better than I?

SHE

Say you still love me; nothing else matters.

HE

I still love you, my own Liette.

SHE

I don't want you to love me out of pity.

HE

I love you.

SHE

When you come near me, are you sure the feel of me doesn't disgust you; doesn't it hurt you to touch me? Tell me, I want to know. [He *strokes her cheek in silence.*] It seems to me as though we can never kiss again.

HE

I don't know what it means to be unworthy of one another as they call it, but if one of us is unworthy of the other, it is undoubtedly I.

SHE

You?

HE

I ought never to have given in to you. I should have stayed behind in Paris.

SHE

You couldn't have let me come away alone.

HE

But that is what it has come to now.

SHE

You are going to leave me?

HE

We shan't be out of poverty's way until I find some pupils again, and you know it, Liette.

SHE

Don't leave me, oh, please don't leave me with three more months of this dreadful tour still to go, three months of winter all alone with this company and the cold and the dirty hotels; I could never stand it; it would make me really ill.

HE

How inconsequent you are, my Liette! A minute ago you were crying and putting yourself into an awful state, as though our two lives were soiled and ruined forever, and here you are already, talking about hotels and the cold as if nothing had happened.

SHE

It is you who are inconsequent. A few minutes ago you pretended to feel neither shame nor jealousy, and now I know you want to go away from me because I have hurt you and you despise me.

HE

[*Gravely.*] No, my Liette, you have never been more dear to me than now. I can see you yielding to that brute, so brave and candid—the sheer desperate simplicity of you touches me beyond speech. But if I were ready to accept the repetition of such a sacrifice, wouldn't you think me a cad?

SHE

[*Vehemently.*] Why need we ever come so low again? These hundred francs have saved us. Just think; in another week I shall be able to get something on account. We'll have at least—oh, at least fifty francs left. And

that is more than enough to last us until the end of the month . . . and then. . . .

HE

Your figures don't convince me, my darling.

SHE

We can be fearfully economical. There are lots of expenses one can avoid. I'll clean my gloves myself and we needn't give any more tips at the hotels.

HE

Don't try and tempt me, dear. It would be so much the stronger way to separate for three months.

SHE

But I'm not strong. I never said I was. I don't want you to go away, darling. . . . [SHE *grips his shoulders.*] And I know you will not go when you hear the whole truth. Listen; what I did this evening was because of you, only you. For myself, I could put up with poverty; it isn't so frightful after all. One of the girls lends you five francs, another one treats you to a dinner, and so you manage to scrape along one way or another. But the thought of not being able to look after you nicely any more as I used to, and your never having enough to eat, and being associated with this beggar's kind of life, and the others laughing at you; that's what I couldn't bear, darling. I can tell by your face that you think I'm just stupid or mad, but I can't help it. . . . I would rather sell myself than see you so humiliated.

HE

[*On his knees before her.*] Liette! Oh, Liette!

SHE

Promise you won't leave me!

HE

[*Sweeping her up in a passionate embrace.*] No, I will not leave you, my darling. I love you and I stay with you. The future can take care of itself.

SHE

[*Smiling.*] That's right; I am happy now.

HE

You must sleep now, love. Here we are, talking and talking, and look, it is almost daylight.

SHE

I am not sleepy.

HE

We have seven hours' train journey to-day.

SHE

I can sleep then instead.

HE

You know you never do. Come, be a good girl and turn in. [SHE *laughs.*] What are you laughing at?

SHE

I couldn't possibly sleep, honestly I couldn't.

HE

Why not?

SHE

[*Still laughing.*] Because I'm too hungry.

HE

Hungry?

SHE

Well, good heavens, we haven't eaten a thing since yesterday morning.

HE

I know we haven't, but what can we do? It's no good ringing at this hour of the night.

SHE

Let's get dressed, and as soon as it is light, we'll go out and find a bakeshop.

HE

That's a good idea.

SHE

How lovely and hot the rolls will be!

CURTAIN

SEVENTH SCENE

The interior of a Gothic Cathedral, in the dusk of a winter afternoon. At the end of the nave, set very high in the wall, is a stained-glass window, and through its softly-tinted panes a ray of yellow sunlight reaches down, as though into a well, and sheds its radiance upon the stage far below, where two or three chairs are placed one behind the other.
THE INGÉNUE *and* THE DUENNA *appear on the right.*

THE INGENUE

[*With tears in her dark eyes. She is short, dark and rather stout.*] No indeed! He had no right to treat me that way. It's none of the stage-manager's business to say to any actor during the rehearsal, "You clear out" like he did. It isn't as though I was interrupting the rehearsal, I was simply asking Larnaudy for my cue. [*They stop.*]

THE DUENNA

[*An old stock-company hack, very much faded and worn, but a motherly soul.*] Don't let that worry you, dearie. When it comes to snubs you know, nobody gets as many as I, except the prompter. And do I let it bother me? No; when they get on my nerves I think of my little dog waiting for me in its basket. You do the same, child; think about something else. Oh, look at that window; it must be a real old one, I'm sure.

INGENUE

What do I care how old the damned thing is? I'm going to put the chief on to Montredon, and it won't be hard, I can tell you. I got him damn well choked off once before when I was in the wrong, so now I'm in the right, he isn't going to wriggle out of it, not if I know it! It's none of his damned business to say "You clear out" to me.

DUENNA

[*Drawing her away.*] Is that what he said to you, "Clear out"?

INGENUE

Yes, "clear out." And I wasn't even disturbing the rehearsal. . . . I was asking Larnaudy for my cue.

DUENNA

And what do you think he said to me the other day; to me, mind you, a woman past fifty?

[*They disappear, left.* MONTREDON *and another actor appear, right, strolling down the aisle.*]

ACTOR

Hasn't she stopped whining yet?

MONTREDON

The next time it happens, I'm going to fine her. I turned her out this time, so as not to have to soak her ten sous.

ACTOR

What did she do?

MONTREDON

She can do all the street-walker stuff she likes, but not on my stage, that's all.

[*They disappear, left.* LARNAUDY *and* SAINT-GALLET *appear, right.* LARNAUDY *is counting his steps.*]

LARNAUDY

47 . . . 48 . . . 49 . . . 50. [*He stops before the window.*] 50 yards. There's an auditorium for you! By stuffing them into every hole of this aisle and the gallery, I'd have a capacity of 5000 at the lowest count.

SAINT-GALLET

[*A seedy-looking, threadbare person, with a vaguely sacerdotal manner.*] Maybe, old man, but no one would come to your shows. They're a religious crowd in this place, and the idea of a play in church would scandalize them to death.

LARNAUDY

It isn't a play; I will present a mystery like they did in the Middle Ages: run one in every Sunday after mass, and only charge four sous a seat; don't tell me they won't come.

SAINT-GALLET

[*Looking at the window.*] I couldn't do my job in this place; it wouldn't feel right, somehow.

LARNAUDY

The trouble with you, Saint-Gallet, is that you've played priests so long, that you've come to believe that you are part of the building: you exaggerate.

SAINT-GALLET

You'll never get permission.

LARNAUDY

I am going to see the archbishop to-day. I shall say to him, "My Lord, this is the position; I am not asking you for publicity or to bear any share of the expenses; I bring you the thing complete, and offer you half the proceeds." He'll come across, don't you worry.

SAINT-GALLET

Oh, no he won't, old man! A bishop doesn't reason like us. Besides you would have to have money.

LARNAUDY

[*Serenely.*] Well, if you call it money—50,000 francs would cover it.

SAINT-GALLET

And where do you propose to find 50,000 francs?

LARNAUDY

That's nothing! Once a thing is well under way, it is easy to find the money.

SAINT-GALLET

What about that idea for an open-air theatre? Have you dropped it?

LARNAUDY

For the time being, yes. And in case this one should fall through, I have an even better one in mind, which could be managed for the asking. In two days the whole thing could be fixed up. Let's go round to the café

and I'll explain it to you. [*Looks at the window.*] That's a nice window . . . a bit dark, though; if they let me have the place, I'll shove a red spot-light behind it . . . would look damn fine don't you think? [*They move towards the exit.*]

SAINT-GALLET

Yes; red . . . or green.

LARNAUDY

Oh, no, old man; green would . . . [*They disappear, left.*]

[SHE *and* HE *appear, right, walking very close together, arm in arm. They advance slowly, talking in hushed voices.*]

SHE

Do you think they have left?

HE

Yes, there they go.

SHE

[*Catching sight of the window.*] Oh, look at that lovely window.

HE

Yes; it isn't nearly so dark as the windows of the choir.

SHE

There's a sunbeam shining through it.

HE

How pale it makes us look!

SHE

Let's sit down a moment. [*They draw their chairs close together and sit there holding hands. A pause.*] What are you thinking about, darling?

HE

[*Worried.*] A curious thing. . . . I have something to tell you, a confession . . . nothing much, you know, but I feel all of a sudden that I can't hide it from you any longer. The night before last in Bordeaux, while you were at the theatre, I followed a woman and went with her.

SHE

[*In surprise.*] You did that?

HE

Yes. . . . I didn't want her; I didn't even see her; it was she who invited me with a look, as she passed me in the street. . . . And then some inexplicable force, some strange compulsion, fastened me to her heels, as it were. She was just the same as thousands of others like her; I don't believe she was even pretty. I only remember very cold white flesh and firm arms hanging heavily at her sides as though the life had been taken out of them.

SHE

Why did you do it?

HE

I have been wondering why all these two days, without finding out.

SHE

And have you found out now?

HE

I am not sure. The reason will be none too nice, whatever it is.

SHE

Lean your head against me and I will put my hands over your eyes and shut mine too . . . so . . . I can't see you now.

HE

[*In a low, shamed voice, trying to find the right words.*] Well, perhaps it was pride . . . a last foolish flaring-up of pride, to prove to myself that I was not a beaten, humiliated creature after all; a final struggle of something within me, to get back its dignity, its lost honour. As though I ever lost my honour and as though going with a prostitute could give it back to me. . . . [*A pause.*] No, that is absurd. It was not that. It must have been rather one of those fits of unreasoning revenge such as make a woman give herself to the first man who comes along, when she discovers her husband is false to her.

SHE

Did you want to revenge yourself on me, darling?

HE

No; *I* didn't want to; but the foul instincts which are in us, who can tell what *they* want? [*Long pause.*] And it wasn't only that either. It was also—an obscure

desire to degrade and besmirch my own self, so that I might feel nearer to you. . . .

SHE

Nearer to me?

HE

[*In a whisper.*] Yes, really *with* you; I wanted to defile myself as you have done. [*A pause.*]

SHE

[*Whispering also.*] Since that day—since that day down at Bar-le-Duc, I think we have loved each other differently. . . .

HE

Yes . . . differently. [*A pause.*]

SHE

It is quite dark, darling.

HE

Come, let us go back.

[*They pass out.*]

CURTAIN

EIGHTH SCENE

A provincial café-chantant: 2 o'clock in the morning. The show is over; the lights are out except for a gas-jet, right. A piano and a small platform are in the rear. Left, in a corner, a waiter is sprawled across a table, asleep.

HE *and the* MUSICIAN *are seated at a table.*

HE

I didn't recognise you until after the last song, when you got up from the piano.

MUSICIAN

And what did you think?

HE

[*Embarrassed.*] Why . . .

MUSICIAN

Oh, don't be afraid you'll hurt my feelings.

HE

Well, I confess I was dumbfounded. The idea of finding you, Crouzols, of all people, in this hole, with a job as pianist in a café-chantant! It is surely just to tide you over a bad spell?

MUSICIAN

No, it is permanent. I have no hopes of bettering myself.

HE

You are not the only one life has been pretty hard on. . . .

MUSICIAN

What are you doing here?

HE

My wife is playing in this stock-company. She said she would meet me here after the show.

MUSICIAN

[*Looking hard at* HE.] I wouldn't say life had been so very hard on me.

HE

Still . . .

MUSICIAN

[*Quickly.*] This place, these threadbare clothes of mine don't exist. What if I told you that life has heaped gifts upon me? Would you believe me?

HE

I don't think I quite understand.

MUSICIAN

Are you waiting here for your wife?

HE

[*Looking at his watch.*] Yes. . . . I can't make out why she is so late.

MUSICIAN

[*Lighting a cigarette.*] We might wait together.

HE

I'd be glad to.

MUSICIAN

You know, don't you, how a man can slip down a ladder rung by rung, without ever being able to get up again? It is such a common story that I will spare you the details; but you must know that before I came down to this, I committed every crime against my art. I have been in the pay of a publisher who, for the sake of the profit to be made out of it, forced me to degrade and ridicule the works of the great masters for his paper. I have spat upon all that was dear to me. I sold myself; I was cynical enough to accept that prostitution for the money I could get for it, and my employer got my salary's worth out of me, I promise you. No slander was too low, no invention too base, to bespatter the things which in the depths of my heart I worshipped.

HE

Were you obliged to take a post like that?

MUSICIAN

Maybe I could have scraped along by some other means. But I didn't. And finally I acquired a taste for my defiler's job; amidst the complete annihilation of my personal hopes, I experienced something akin to joy in spitting upon my masters! I wallowed in insulting and denying them; it was a vengeance, do you understand, a vengeance for my own misery and impotence.

HE

I do not blame you; I understand.

MUSICIAN

And in the end, what do you think was the outcome of my infamies? I was rewarded. I struck my art in the face; I dragged in through the mire, and it retaliated with a princely recompense. Sounds extremely funny, doesn't it?

HE

How do you mean?

MUSICIAN

You will think me conceited and blind, but it doesn't matter what anyone thinks; I can prove my theories. I mean that in the midst of all my vileness, I became a true artist at last. Ever since the days when we knew each other, I had been a failure. Well, I found in my utter corruption, that quality of grace which in the purity of my life, and in the love of my art, had been denied me. Treason, hatred and degeneracy unlocked a source of beauty which flows obscurely but at full tide within me. The music I write now is so new, so strange, that I am afraid of it. Say, can you begin to imagine how a café-chantant rat who spends six hours a day accompanying street-songs for street-women, can have become a creator? Can you imagine it?

HE

[*Deeply moved.*] Yes, I think I can.

MUSICIAN

Why is it that joy and salvation and the purest ecstasies known to man should have come to me now, now?

HE

Because of your wrongdoing, Crouzols. Love by itself is not enough to make one's passion a living and fecund thing. Perhaps one must also defile what one loves. That may be the price at which greatness, beauty and love are bought; and we, we who have aspirations, who have known the intolerable torments of desire, ah, we shall surely never possess anything whatever, except at that price.

MUSICIAN

What prompted you with that idea?

HE

It has been working itself out in my mind for weeks past.

MUSICIAN

Did the problem come up for you, too?

HE

Maybe.

MUSICIAN

Was it to do with your art?

HE

No, not my art.

MUSICIAN

What then?

HE

[*Rising.*] Why need it have concerned me personally at all? One thinks about things you know, and you

have only to look at life to realise that goodness and purity of the soul are mere words, empty sounds signifying nothing, and that all strength, all possession, all fullness, have their origin in evil.

MUSICIAN

[*Rising also.*] Come over to my room. I want you to hear what I am writing.

HE

All right, let's go.

MUSICIAN

But what about your wife? What if she should come and not find you?

HE

[*Turning his head away.*] I don't think she will come now.

MUSICIAN

What is the time?

HE

[*Looking at his watch.*] Quarter to three.

MUSICIAN

The theatre has been out a long time, anyhow.

HE

[*Wearily.*] Yes . . . she must have gone back to the hotel.

MUSICIAN

Come!

[*They go out.*]

CURTAIN

NINTH SCENE

A hotel bed-room, evening. SHE *and* HE *are sitting on a couch, their arms about one another. The room is dimly lighted by one lamp.*

SHE

My darling. . . .

HE

My Liette. . . . I have never loved you as I do now.

SHE

Nor I you, my love.

HE

I have never known such happiness. Have you? Can you look back into your youth, into the golden mists of your early childhood, and call to mind one single moment fuller and sweeter than this?

SHE

No. The existence I have had to drag so wearily along with me until now seems suddenly like someone else's life, not mine; it has no more meaning to me. I have stopped wanting things; only your arms around me, and nothing, nothing more.

HE

I think we have reached the frontier of our lives, be-

yond which there is nothing. If I had to die to-morrow I should say yes, without a pang.

SHE

So should I; I am quite willing for it all to end right now.

HE

How meanly we loved each other before, with everlasting doubts and misgivings, and even at the best of times that goad towards the unknown, and that anguish for the unknowable.

SHE

While now, it is as though deep waters lay between us, fathomless, breathing waters. . . .

HE

Something within us has come to rest. Oh, I have known enough of torment! I have searched long enough for the key-word to the riddle of life, for the truth towards which I believed I was being urged.

SHE

It was something far simpler than that. . . .

HE

There was no key-word and no truth, but only the way of loving one another which is ours; this pity of our lips for our lips; these two souls of ours, tied together by poverty like the birds they carry to market, still alive. I believe this future was clear to you from the very first day—some presentiment must have told you.

SHE

Oh no, darling. I knew nothing. In fact I thought it was really foolhardy of us to go out on tour and run the risk of becoming penniless. Who could have told that poverty would make us so rich? It is hardly possible to grasp what has happened to us. Everything deceives you, everything fails you; you are shut up in your hopelessness as in a cellar, when suddenly something takes hold of you and leads you gently out. In the darkest depths of your sorrow, a door opens and the light comes in; your soul is filled with a tenderness you have never known before; you are at peace. Anxiety and fear have gone from you; you have come into your own. It is very strange.

HE

There is one thing I have never talked to you about; I have only known it for certain a little while.

SHE

What is it, my darling?

HE

It is that mere unhappiness is not enough to cause that light of yours to shine.

SHE

What else must there be?

HE

There must be guilt.

SHE

[*Pondering his words.*] But . . . I don't feel guilty.

HE

Why, my dear Liette. . . .

SHE

At least . . . that is beside the point.

HE

No it isn't. There are, in life, certain peaks which are surrounded, one might say, with a lake of turbid and muddy water, and no one can scale those peaks unless they first cross the lake.

SHE

[*Uneasily.*] Then do you really think the way we are living . . .

HE

I don't think; I know.

SHE

Now you have found a new idea to worry over.

HE

I am not worrying. I am analysing myself.

SHE

And I thought you loved me enough not to think about anything any more.

HE

Still, one has to know oneself. Oh, the deeps of the soul are a pretty sort of swamp! The monsters that live in it are . . . well, somewhat evil-smelling!

SHE

I don't care about that; it doesn't interest me.

HE

No human happiness exists that is not built upon the back of some foul-faced beast.

SHE

You seem to take delight in saying the most horrible and unjust things about yourself.

HE

Bah! Who else could have overcome every kind of suffering and every kind of pride, but a waster and a rotter like me!

SHE

That is what you say, my darling, but you are crying all the while.

CURTAIN

TENTH SCENE

The lobby of a small provincial theatre, during an interval. On the right is a buffet counter behind which a stout barmaid is enthroned, in a setting of two small iron tables and four chairs. The audience pass two by two, turning about like a merry-go-round. The couples are composed as follows:

THE MAGISTRATE, *a tall, pontifical old man, with a dogmatic manner of speech and an automatic gait, and his* DAUGHTER, *a mincing creature in black taffeta;* THE CURATOR *of the museum, dome-browed, wild-haired, half-blind, with disordered gestures, and his dropsical* WIFE *so outrageously laced into a gown of brilliant purple satin, that she can hardly walk;* THE CHEMIST, *over-free in his manners, and* THE RAKE, *bald-headed, but wearing heavy mustaches which he strokes continually. A hunchbacked* GIRL *in a spotted muslin frock, alone. Lastly, a* CORPORAL *with a dejected-looking* PRIVATE.

THE MAGISTRATE

[*Passing on his daughter's arm.*] So far, I am favourably impressed. The play is not unwholesome, the characters express themselves with elegance and their sentiments are irreproachable. The old marquis' speech has really a great deal of dignity.

THE PRIVATE

[*Passing.*] Pity to have shelled out 20 cents and not had any fun out of it yet.

THE CORPORAL

Well, I told you so. What sort of fun do you expect from a play with only six people in it? Not a chance.

THE LIBRARIAN

[*Passing on his wife's arm.*] We have been spoiled, that's what it is. When one has seen Sarah Bernhardt in the Dame aux Camelias. . . . [*Show of inordinate admiration.*]

HIS WIFE

I didn't see that.

THE LIBRARIAN

[*Becoming angry.*] Why, Valentine, don't you remember the Dame aux Camelias?

HIS WIFE

Was she the one who was sent to the scaffold?

THE RAKE

[*Passing on* THE CHEMIST'S *arm.*] Did you notice the chicken that's playing the marquis's daughter?

THE CHEMIST

You bet. I've seen her near. She was in the shop this afternoon.

THE RAKE

You don't say. What did she buy?

THE MAGISTRATE

[*Passing.*] Quite so; quite so. You prefer the poetic

drama; it is a taste which has nothing whatever reprehensible in itself. The only thing is that the poetic part should never be overdone; all such things as moonlight and fantasy and vague yearnings of the soul are unwholesome—unwholesome.

THE PRIVATE

[*Passing.*] I'll tell you, old chap; these actress wenches are like officers' wives. You can go on handing them out ten francs and ten francs and ten francs, but they'll never let a corpóral touch them.

CORPORAL

I don't know so much about that; there's a little dark one . . .

LIBRARIAN'S WIFE

[*Passing.*] So the traitor is the marquis's son, then?

THE LIBRARIAN

[*Still angry.*] No, no. His son-in-law.

HIS WIFE

But isn't the girl his niece?

THE LIBRARIAN

No, she's his daughter. Oh, my dear Valentine, it isn't worth while coming to the theatre if you don't even understand the main points of the play. . . .

THE RAKE

[*Passing.*] Finally she said she would meet me here.

THE CHEMIST

After the show?

THE RAKE

No, presently, during the third act. She isn't in it.

[*The bell rings for the end of the interval. The merry-go-round comes to a standstill.*]

THE MAGISTRATE

The action is about to continue; let us return to our seats. [*Exit rear with his daughter.*]

THE PRIVATE

Maybe we'll have some fun this act. [*Goes out with* CORPORAL.]

THE LIBRARIAN

[*Going out.*] Now, do try and understand.

THE RAKE

[*Leaving his friend.*] I'll leave you here. . . .

THE CHEMIST

[*Going out.*] Good luck. [*As the rest of the audience files out,* THE RAKE *goes up to the buffet.*]

BARMAID

What's for you, sir? A sip of Calvados?

THE RAKE

No, give me something sweet; I'm waiting for a chicken.

THE BARMAID

Syrup of orgeat?

THE RAKE

Yes, that will do . . . and two glasses.

[THE BARMAID *pours out the drinks and sets the glasses on one of the tables.* SHE *appears, left.* SHE *is in her stage costume, but has thrown a cloak over her grey silk frock, and wound a scarf about her head. Her make-up should look like stage make-up seen on the street.*]

THE RAKE

[*Going towards her.*] This *is* nice of you!

SHE

Is it ?

THE RAKE

I was so afraid you might not come. Sit down. [*They sit.*] Your face is quite red, you poor little thing.

SHE

That is because I haven't taken my make-up off.

THE RAKE

That make-up must be awfully unhealthy.

SHE

Unhealthy?

THE RAKE

For the skin. Some men would object to it. [*Sprightly.*] But not I; oh no! I am altogether different. [*She lowers her eyes.*] Do drink your or-

geat. [*She drinks.*] Do you know what I thought when we passed each other in front of the theatre?

SHE

No.

THE RAKE

I said to myself "By Jove, there goes a pretty girl"! And what did you think?

SHE

I said to myself, "Oh, there's the ticket speculator."

THE RAKE

[*Uneasily.*] The ticket speculator?

SHE

I am very short-sighted.

THE RAKE

You don't dislike me, do you?

SHE

Why, of course I don't.

THE RAKE

These Parisian women! One never knows what's in their minds. Ah, I know 'em, the little minxes!

SHE

Really?

THE RAKE

[*In a transport.*] Ah, Paris, Paris! The theatres;

the cafés; the Hotel de Ville! There's a monumental structure for you, that Hotel de Ville! And the Porte Maillot! And the Madeleine!

SHE

[*Cryptically.*] And the Bastille!

THE RAKE

And Saint Germain des Prés!

SHE

And Montmartre!

THE RAKE

[*In an ecstasy.*] Montmartre! What a paradise! I used to go there every evening. I knew crowds of artists in the brasseries there. Jove, what times they have, those fellows! That's the life! The rotten thing about this place, you know, is that a man of brains can't find anything to use his talents on. . . . So you end up wondering what's the good of intelligence, anyway. It doesn't happen once a year that I meet a woman I can exchange ideas with. But I can with you; you really are a very clever woman.

SHE

Do you think so?

THE RAKE

Anyone can see that. You are sad, too, and I adore that in a woman.

SHE

That's good.

THE RAKE

[*Embracing her.*] I have always dreamed of being loved by a sad woman. What stunning shoulders you have; and I have a perfect horror of those high-busted figures. [*He caresses her; she closes her eyes upon the sorrow that is in them.*] Is that a promise? To-night at my place, after the theatre? [*She nods consent.*] You shall not regret it, darling. Oh, I am not conceited; I know I haven't always been loved for myself, but I only want to tell you that of all the better-class young men in this town, I am the least played-out and the most liberal: and what's more, none of them know as well as I how to treat a woman.

[*While he is speaking,* HE *has entered, left; first hesitating in the doorway, then crossing the stage and going out, rear. A shudder passes through her.*]

Who is that person?

SHE

Somebody . . . somebody belonging to the company. [*She turns her head and sees* HE *watching them, half-hidden. To the* RAKE.] I must go back to my dressing-room now.

THE RAKE

[*Holding her hands.*] Already?

SHE

Yes, at once.

THE RAKE

[*Detaining her.*] You have plenty of time; the act is just beginning.

SHE

I have to change.

THE RAKE

[*Still holding her back.*] Just one moment more, darling! I have so many things to say to you.

SHE

[*In a casual tone.*] Would you be frightened if you were shot at with a revolver?

THE RAKE

What? Which revolver?

SHE

If you don't let go my hands, it is possible that that man over there will shoot you with his revolver.

[THE RAKE *releases her sharply with a Ha! of consternation. Then his presence of mind returns and he bursts out laughing.* SHE *crosses the stage quickly and goes out, left.*]

THE RAKE

[*Follows her, laughing.*] Oh, the wicked little fibber! They are ripping, these Parisians; but they can't get the better of me! I know women; I know 'em!

[*He goes out, still laughing and talking to himself.* HE *comes slowly down the stage, with uncertain steps.* HE *walks round the table where* SHE *sat, sits down on her chair and plays absently with her spoon.*]

THE BARMAID

What's for you, sir? A Calvados?

CURTAIN

ELEVENTH SCENE

A hotel bed-room, where SHE *is in bed. It is pitch dark. A key is heard turning in the lock.*

SHE

[*Turning round.*] Is that you, darling? [HE *enters, carrying a lighted candle which casts a flickering glow about the room.*] I positively can't sleep a wink. I have heard it strike twelve and half-past, and a quarter to one and one. I'm absolutely worn out. [HE *stops in the middle of the room, the candlestick in his hand, and stares at her with a dazed expression.*] I was frightened here all alone; this old building is full of noises; it must be the sea-breeze in the lofts. And there are mice, too. . . . [*She runs her hand along the wainscot.*] The paper is stuck on canvas and you can hear them running right up against it. I am so glad you are back. [*Suddenly the candlestick falls from his hand and the light is extinguished.* HE *does not move.*] What's the matter darling? Wait, here are the matches. [*She gets out of bed.*] Where is the candle? Didn't you pick it up? [*There is the sound of her foot striking the candlestick.* SHE *picks it up, lights the candle, and sets it on the table.*] Why, what ever is the matter with you? Why don't you say something? [*He laughs foolishly.* SHE *goes up to him.*] Where have you come from so late? [*All at once she realises that he has been drinking. Compassionately.*] Your breath still smells of brandy, darling.

HE

[*Quite drunk.*] No, not brandy—whisky and soda! Whisky and soda! I was at the American bar . . . some Englishmen treated me; they told me about their lives; some lives, too, you've no idea! Russia, Japan, India, always on the go; and rolling in money.

SHE

Sit down and I will take your things off for you. [SHE *guides him to a chair on to which he drops, still talking vacantly.*]

HE

It was nice in that bar; all got up in bamboo, chairs, tables and everything, and they have two mulatto servants. Listening to those Englishmen's stories, I imagined myself in the colonies, too, or on board ship . . . you remember that Indian liner we saw here a little while ago? It's cold in this room.

SHE

I asked the boy to make a fire but he wouldn't. He said the chimney didn't draw and the room would be filled with smoke. I don't suppose it's true. [SHE *takes his hat, undoes his tie and takes off his collar. Then* SHE *kneels before him and begins to unlace his boots. Gradually her tears overwhelm her, and she lays her head against his knees, weeping.*] Were you so unhappy then, my dearest; as unhappy as all that?

CURTAIN

TWELTH SCENE

A station waiting-room, night. Dark benches, right and left. In the centre, a table. An unseen gas-jet sends a feeble light from above. On the bench right, the figure of the INGÉNUE *is discerned, asleep. On the bench left, the* DUENNA *dozes with her dog in a basket beside her.* SAINT-GALLET *is sitting with his elbows on the table, facing the audience. He yawns. Suitcases and cardboard boxes scattered about.*

LARNAUDY

[*Enters left, first. He is in a bad temper.*] The buffet is closed.

SAINT-GALLET

[*Yawning.*] What time does it open?

LARNAUDY

At six.

SAINT-GALLET

And when does the train leave?

LARNAUDY

Two minutes to; no grub for us. [*Sits down, grumbling.*]

SAINT-GALLET

[*Yawning.*] I don't care; I've got some sandwiches.

LARNAUDY

All right, eat them; but don't talk about them.

SAINT-GALLET

I'm not hungry.

LARNAUDY

Then offer some to me.

SAINT-GALLET

No, old man; I know myself. As soon as we're off, I'll be hungry.

DUENNA

[*Leaning over the basket.*] Now you've done it! You've woken her up. [*Talking to the dog.*] There, there girlie! They woke us up, those horrid men, and we were sleeping *so* nicely waiting for the puff-puff. Never mind, let's go to sleep again, mama's little doggie, bye-bye, bye-bye. . . .

LARNAUDY

You'd better give it a piece of chocolate.

DUENNA

Why chocolate?

LARNAUDY

Oh, because chocolate . . .

MONTREDON

[*Entering, left.*] The buffet is closed.

LARNAUDY

We are already aware of that interesting fact.

THE INGENUE

[*Leaping to her feet.*] This is the last time they get me to leave at these unearthly hours. There's absolutely no sense in wearing us all to shreds just for the fun they get out of it. The show isn't out till midnight and by the time you've packed your things it's one already. You get back to the hotel at half-past and it's two before you've got your luggage done up, and then they make you leave at five. No way of getting any rest; they expect you to sleep in waiting-rooms and you can't even do that with these pigs going in and out the whole time. I'm sick of it and if it goes on like this I'm going to chuck up the tour altogether.

MONTREDON

[*Mockingly.*] The lady has a grievance? Well, perhaps the lady will kindly express her grievance to the director. I am here to see the time-table is carried out.

THE INGENUE

You make us catch impossible trains just for pure spite. There's another one at ten; why couldn't we take that?

MONTREDON

Because it doesn't get in at Rouxbaix until seven in the evening.

INGENUE

Which would be plenty time enough, seeing we don't start till nine.

MONTREDON

The lady forgets I have to have my scene rehearsal.

INGENUE

I don't give a damn for your blasted scene rehearsal.

MONTREDON

No doubt the lady would prefer to receive a ceiling on her jaw in the middle of the play?

INGENUE

I'd prefer not to be driven to death. I'm darn well going to complain to the chief; this evening, too, I promise you.

MONTREDON

Go ahead. And I shall tell him that the lady arrived at the theatre yesterday one hour late and missed her entrance.

INGENUE

I was asleep.

MONTREDON

Who with?

INGENUE

Not with you, anyhow, you dirty pup, you.

LARNAUDY

Have something to eat, little girl; it will calm your nerves. Take a bit of chocolate.

INGENUE

[*Crying with temper.*] I'm not hungry; I'm sleepy. It ought to be forbidden by law to make a woman do without her proper sleep.

DUENNA

She is right. For three days we have been sleeping in trains and waiting rooms; we can't go on much longer like this; my dog is tired out.

MONTREDON

[*Raising his arms in a gesture of resigned despair.*] Oh, if the tike's beginning to give out, of course. . . .

DUENNA

This little animal needs rest every bit as much as a great hulk like you, M. Montredon. More, maybe.

LARNAUDY

[*Emphatically.*] I can do without sleep, but only so long as I get enough to eat.

SAINT-GALLET

[*Dolefully, with his head in his hands.*] The rotten part for me is that my memory goes to the devil. Another three weeks of this life, and I shan't answer for anything.

MONTREDON

That will be delightful. As it is, you go dry six times during a show.

SAINT-GALLET

No, old man, I don't go dry; I mix up my parts, which is quite a different thing. When a man has been playing nothing but priests for twenty years, the old lines will keep coming back, you know.

MONTREDON

The result is the same.

SHE

[*Comes in, left, carrying a cardboard hat-box and followed by* HE, *muffled up to the ears, carrying a suit-case.*] Do you know the buffet is closed?

LARNAUDY

[*Springing up.*] You *don't* mean it!

MONTREDON

[*His hand on his heart.*] Oh, you did give me a shock!

SHE

[*Sitting down.*] I'm done up, Montredon. I don't know how I'm ever going to play this evening.

HE

She hasn't closed her eyes for ten days; it is awful. [HE *coughs.*]

SHE

Go and see if we can't get a little hot milk or coffee or something.

MONTREDON

But the buffet is closed.

SHE

Try and get them to open it.

MONTREDON

All right; I'll try if you like. [*Exit left.*]

LARNAUDY

[*To* HE.] And how is your laryngitis, my dear author?

HE

[*Coughing.*] Not too good, Larnaudy.

LARNAUDY

I know a remedy that Guitry told me of. We were touring Russia and one evening in Moscow, the Grand-Duke Constantine, with whom I had the honour of being on the most friendly terms . . .

SAINT-GALLET

No, no, old man, not the story of the Grand Duke, please.

LARNAUDY

But this gentleman has not heard it.

[MONTREDON *comes back, left.*]

SHE

Well?

MONTREDON

Nothing doing just yet, but we'll have plenty of time to eat presently.

LARNAUDY

How's that?

MONTREDON

The train is delayed an hour and twenty minutes.

[*Murmurs of resentment.*] What? Aren't you satisfied yet? You wanted to sleep, now sleep.

INGENUE

You beast! You beast! You beast!

MONTREDON

What's got into that one, I'd like to know?

INGENUE

This is what's got into me—I'll be damned if I stay here another two hours. I'm going back to bed and if I miss the train, it'll be your funeral and you can take the next one. It's the limit! Here we might have spent half the night decently in bed, but no, the *manager* must make us stick around this station for hours, instead. I suppose you couldn't have found out before that the train was going to be late?

[*She goes out.*]

DUENNA

[*Worried.*] We had better give her her ticket.

MONTREDON

[*Who has seen a good deal of this sort of thing.*] Don't upset yourself, Madame Gueuroz. She'll be back in fifteen minutes; she's only gone back to her bell-boy.

CURTAIN

THIRTEENTH SCENE

A hotel bed-room in Flanders. SHE *is in bed;* HE *is sitting in a large armchair beside a table containing a bottle and a glass. Church-bells are ringing the hour.*

SHE

[*Exasperated.*] What a nuisance having a room next door to the belfry; this chime every quarter of an hour is unbearable.

HE

[*Dreamily, his head thrown back.*] No; it is nice. It's soothing, like an idea trying to throw a spell over you, the idea of God saying, "I am here; up above you, waiting. Do please try and come to me." Obviously that is what we ought to do; there we would find peace, acquiescence.

SHE

Don't go to sleep there, darling. Come to bed.

HE

[*Looking at her.*] It's no use. I should not go to sleep even if I did.

SHE

Why not?

HE

I have a feeling I shouldn't. [SHE *sighs deeply and sits up.*]

SHE

You might try, anyway. It is half-past two.

HE

It's no use.

SHE

We leave at eight.

HE

Lie down and go to sleep; don't bother about me.

SHE

[*Slipping on a dressing-gown.*] You can't go on like this, you know.

HE

Like what?

SHE

Torturing yourself this way.

HE

I can't help it.

SHE

Before, you usedn't to take things so hard, and now when there is no more reason for doing so, now you begin.

HE

It isn't my fault.

SHE

But you were quite reconciled to everything.

HE

Are you? Have you got over the rottenness of it?

SHE

I don't allow the past to consume me as you do.

HE

Women never can look one week before or behind them.

SHE

But you are living on nothing but memories; and such memories too—such sad and shameful ones. It is like diving continually into dreadful black water; you will surely go mad or have some fearful break-down if you go on like this. Haven't you will enough to make yourself forget?

HE

There is only one way to forget and that is unfortunately an imperfect way. So soon as I am not drunk, it all comes back to me.

SHE

When I see you so desperately unhappy, I blame myself for not suffering as deeply as you.

HE

Oh, I know it is morbid to gnaw one's heart out like this, but knowing you have a disease and curing it are two different things. [HE *rises.*] I guess you are right; we might as well pretend to sleep. [HE *takes off his vest.*] It is freezing here—smells of cold soot and mildew. Ugh! What a hole!

SHE

Imagine Larnaudy recommending us this for a hotel.

HE

Did the others come down here?

SHE

Most of them; I wonder why. Did you notice the people in the café? What hideous faces! And that nigger flirting with the cashier! It must be he in the next room; I heard someone in there talking in some outlandish language; not English or Flemish or German or anything else European. [SHE *shivers.*] How cold it is! Do come to bed.

HE

[*As though in spite of himself.*] It must have been nicer at Bruges, in your room at the Jacques-Cœur.

SHE

[*With her eyes fixed on his face.*] Why must it have been nicer?

HE

Oh, I'm only supposing, of course; I never was in it.

SHE

Again?

HE

Please tell me how it happened with that young man you met at the brasserie.

SHE

You have already asked me that ten times.

HE

I have observed that your explanations do not quite tally.

SHE

You do get the most absurd ideas into your head.

HE

You told me he got in in spite of you.

SHE

That is the truth.

HE

But hadn't you bolted the door?

SHE

No.

HE

Why not? Since you didn't mean to let him in. . . .

SHE

I don't know—I can't remember.

HE

You had made up your mind to have him in. Lie number one.

SHE

No, no. . . . I . . .

HE

Well?

SHE

[*In utter weariness.*] I have told you everything. You know it all—except the unspeakable banality and the emptiness and the boredom of these episodes. That part is beyond your imagination.

HE

No doubt there have been others, less boring, which you have not confessed to me.

SHE

Others? I have never lied to you, my dear. And you know perfectly well that for a month . . .

HE

What is there to prove you haven't been going on doing the same thing through force of habit, or vice, or indifference?

SHE

You have gone quite mad!

HE

I have no means of telling whether amongst the peo-

ple who trail into your dressing-room every evening—or your fellow actors . . .

SHE

Be quiet; you are talking absolute nonsense.

HE

It is only logical, however, that I should ask myself the question.

SHE

I don't care a rap for your logic!

HE

It is worth none the less for that.

SHE

And the good it does you is to ruin and destroy your life. . . .

[*A pause.*]

HE

I sometimes have the feeling that we are surviving ourselves; that our real life ended long ago.

SHE

Yes, I have often thought so too.

HE

How long do you think we were happy?

SHE

Two weeks, maybe three . . . I don't know.

HE

That's just it. We ought not to have gone on living beyond that.

SHE

If you had wished it then, I should not have been afraid to die.

HE

And would you be now?

SHE

Perhaps not. People always talk of life as though it were an enormous, drab-coloured length of stuff which they have to go on unrolling and unrolling for nearly a hundred years. You and I could never endure anything so slow and dismal.

HE

When you are ready, say the word; it would not be difficult. I have a revolver. . . . But I think of all the fools who will say we have made a mess of our lives. And the annoying part of it that they will be right! We have made a bad job of life.

SHE

What do you call life?

HE

The life that is made for people who love a little and lie a little and suffer a little; just life. We have never even begun to know it. Oh! If I could only be certain that our life at least, yours and mine, such as it was within our own soul's scope, had been lived to the full.

SHE

My darling . . . think of those few weeks. [HE *smiles bitterly.*] Don't laugh. Put your doubts away from you. Oh, let there be at least one strong and sacred thing behind us which we have not destroyed.

HE

My dear Liette! Is it possible that you really believe so implicitly in this happiness of yours?

SHE

Indeed I do; and so did you, before. You used to say it was given us because of our faults.

HE

Do you remember Crouzols, the musician, whom I met again in a café-chantant? He also believed his rottenness had been worth inspiration and genius to him.

SHE

Well?

HE

He took me home with him and played me the stuff he was composing: mere combings from the Russians, the most deplorable reminiscences you ever heard! I didn't have the heart to undeceive him.

SHE

We have never deceived ourselves.

HE

Conceit! Conceit! Those are the delusions our sick minds fool us with. We will not have it that the mire

in which *we* wallow is ordinary mire! No, it must smell sweet, for must we not be happy in it? We shout our happiness aloud for all the world to hear, ourselves also. We must believe it too, in order that we may not be sickened to death. Ah, the foolish, foolish, self-deception of it all!

SHE

[*Vehemently.*] No! Our love has not been a self-deception. Aren't you ashamed to deny it like this? What is this frightful mania for turning everything into suspicion? I know, I *know* our love has been real.

HE

[*As though to himself.*] For three weeks.

SHE

[*Tenderly.*] You must stop tormenting yourself, darling; you have nothing whatever to regret; there is no such thing as making a bad job of one's life.

[*The chime rings out again.*]

HE

[*With a bitter laugh.*] And what about that one up there, spreading his nets at our feet? Ah, if only we might let ourselves be caught!

SHE

You promised you would try and sleep.

HE

Let's have a drink instead.

SHE

You have had enough this evening.

HE

Am I drunk?

SHE

No, thank God.

HE

Then I haven't had enough. [*He pours himself out a drink.*] None for you?

SHE

No. [HE *drinks.*]

HE

There is a Chinese poem which goes like this:

Life is black; Death is black;
A monkey gambols over the graves;
I drink . . . I drink . . . as much as I can drink.

[HE *laughs tipsily.*] It's the best a man can do, after all. [HE *takes another drink.*] You are looking at me as though you loathe me.

SHE

Oh no, darling; quite the other way. It does me good to have something bad to forgive you for.

[HE *empties his glass; fills it up again and drinks.* SHE *is in tears.*]

HE

What are you crying for?

SHE

I don't know.

HE

You are always crying these days, but I don't see what you've got to cry for. [*Raising his voice.*] Do *I* cry? [HE *drinks.*] There's some shining thing winding and unwinding itself continually inside my head like a steel spring; it's no end of a pleasant sensation.

SHE

Don't drink any more, sweetheart! Please!

HE

Why not? I feel merrier already. [*Drinks.*] Queer how this stuff clears up your ideas. You are right; people who worry their heads over their destiny and their aim in life and all that sort of twaddle are nothing but idiots. Melancholy sort of idiots, too. [*Drinks.*] What aim? What destiny? There isn't any; we don't reach anything and we don't get anywhere. The place hasn't yet been discovered where a man can have his life and still have freedom to breathe. You can't possess a thing in peace, not even your mire; you can't stop, you have to go on rolling and rolling; like this tour of yours, going from one train and station and theatre to another forever. You have a red-hot iron in your entrails pushing you forward every second you live. Time won't let us own one single minute. [*Drinks.*] A goal? Who set it? The universe doesn't give a tinker's curse for us; the earth goes on turning round and doesn't even know we exist. Nobody knows we're here. [*Drinks.*] So what's the good of wanting to be something? What difference can it make to me whether I am honoured in the world or spat upon? Whether I am a genius or the lowest kind of half-wit? Seeing that every one of us is foredoomed to the same fool's end—

to rot away without having accomplished anything or understood anything, as useless and forgotten as carrion in the desert.

[HE *refills his glass.*]

SHE

That's enough, dear; that's enough.

HE

Why is it? Suppose it pleases me to roll on the floor? Suppose I want this stuff to do for me?

"I drink, I drink, as much as I can drink."

[HE *takes a long draught; very drunk.*] I'm through with ill-temper now; I don't give a damn for anything any more, not even for your beastliness. You can take whom you like to bed with you for aught I care; the hotel porter even if that's any fun for you. Do you hear? Even the hotel porter. I don't give a damn what you do. [*Drinks.*]

SHE

Darling, please do calm yourself.

HE

[*Completely drunk, looking at her malevolently.*] There's only one thing I forbid you—don't you dare go making fun of me with your lovers. That I'll not stand!

SHE

[*Aghast.*] I? I make. . . .

HE

[*Breaking out at last.*] Yes, you have!

SHE

Oh, don't shout, darling! Don't make yourself angry.

HE

Never you mind about that. Don't pretend to think I don't know what I'm talking about; you can't play the innocent with me. . . . I'm stewed all right but I've still got my head on straight. You *have* been making fun of me.

SHE

[*Imploring him.*] My dearest!

HE

And I'll tell you who with . . . that sub-lieutenant at Falaise.

SHE

[*Dumbfounded.*] At Falaise?

HE

I heard you. You were laughing at my muffler as you came out of the theatre.

SHE

I don't even know whom you mean.

HE

[*Shouting.*] Splendid! Splendid! She nudges him with her knee in the bus, she has him in her bed afterwards, and then she forgets him! Brothel women don't know their clients again, either; they see too many of them!

SHE

Be quiet, dear. You are not in your right mind.

HE

That won't prevent me from punishing you, you slut, and giving you what you deserve!

[HE *illuses her.*]

SHE

Oh, how can you strike me? How can you? How can you?

HE

[*Beating her.*] Why not? Who are you, anyway? Eh? Who are we both?

SHE

[*Moaning.*] You are hurting me!

HE

[*Still beating her.*] So much the better. And look out for kicks if you yell.

SHE

[*On the floor, sobbing and crying out.*] Oh, you are hurting me! You are hurting me!

[*Through the wall, a furious voice is heard in the next room, scolding in the outlandish accents of some unrecognisable language.* HE *stops.* SHE *rises to her feet, and they stand listening. After a moment, she bursts into hysterical laughter.*]

HE

What's the matter with you?

SHE

[*Laughing uncontrollably.*] The nigger! It's the nigger!

HE

[*Coming at her menacingly.*] Quit that laughing, do you hear? Stop it, I tell you. . . .

[*She goes on laughing.*]

CURTAIN

FOURTEENTH SCENE

The same room, in the light of early dawn. The bed is in disorder. HE *is sitting on the floor with his back against the wainscot at the far end of the room. The church bells are ringing. Somebody knocks impatiently at the door.*

MONTREDON'S VOICE

Are you there, Juliet? We're going now; it is half past seven. [*A pause. Another voice says something and* MONTREDON *answers.*] Are you sure they haven't gone out? Neither of them? [*He knocks again.*] Wake up, for goodness' sake, or you'll miss the train.

HE [*who has been gazing intently at the floor, now stirs, and discloses a revolver in his hand.* HE *slips it into his pocket. Someone is heard coming along the landing, humming a tune.*]

THE VOICE

What's all this?

MONTREDON

Juliet doesn't answer.

THE VOICE

[*On a mocking note, parodying a passage out of one of the repertory's plays.*]

Aurora, finger-tipped with rose,
Now opes the portals of the sky;

Yet thou this sweetest hour must lose,
If next thy spouse morose thou lie.
Awake and come, Aline most fair,
The fragrance of my garden breathe,
And tell me if thy lips so rare,
My kisses rather. . . .

MONTREDON

For heaven's sake stop that row! [HE *knocks louder.*] Are you there? [*To someone on the landing.*] Have you got a master-key?

THE VOICE

Are you going to open the door?

ANOTHER VOICE

Why don't they answer?

MONTREDON

We're going to find out why.

A VOICE

Some joke, I guess. [*There is the sound of a key turning in the lock.* MONTREDON *enters with* LARNAUDY. HE *does not move.*]

MONTREDON

[*Not seeing* HE.] What's this? Nobody here?

LARNAUDY

[*Drawing a curtain aside and opening the window.*] Wait, I'll let some light in. [*Catching sight of* HE.] Why, look here!

MONTREDON

What do you think you're doing there?

SAINT-GALLET

[*Who has come in behind them.*] Good Lord, the man's blind drunk!

LARNAUDY

Not for the first time, either. Ah, young man, what a future you are storing up for yourself. And not for yourself only, but also for your charming lady. Why, where is she, that charming lady of his?

MONTREDON

Where's Juliet?

[*The* INGÉNUE *and the* DUENNA *have come in on their way downstairs, the latter carrying her dog's basket. Behind them, the negro from next-door has slipped into the room. He stands transfixed in ecstatic contemplation of the* INGÉNUE.]

THE DUENNA

Isn't she here?

LARNAUDY

[*Leaning over* HE.] Here! They are asking you where you wife is, my dear author.

HE

I am alone.

MONTREDON

What? Has she gone out already? But the door

was locked and you hardly look fit to have locked it yourself.

[*The* NEGRO, *growing bolder, has drawn near to the* INGÉNUE. *He strokes her arm.*]

NEGRO

Pretty missy! Pretty! Pretty!

INGENUE

[*Noticing him now for the first time, with a startled exclamation.*] Oh, where did *this* come from? What's he trying to do?

[*She thrusts him away from her and he lurches backwards on to the bed, but springs up immediately with a cry of terror, and rushes to the other end of the room where he stands trembling in the doorway, pointing towards the bed and whimpering childishly. Confusion.* MONTREDON *and* LARNAUDY *rush over to the bed and tearing off the bedclothes, discover Juliet's body.* SHE *is half undressed; a thin stream of blood flows from her breast. The* NEGRO *rushes out, frantic.*]

SAINT-GALLET

Oh, my God!

MONTREDON

She has fainted.

LARNAUDY

No! Look at the blood.

INGENUE

Oh! Oh! Murder! Murder!

MONTREDON

[*Turning on her.*] You shut up, or get out, quick!

SAINT-GALLET

Maybe she isn't. . . .

MONTREDON

Her head . . . lift up her head. . . .

LARNAUDY

Give me the pillow . . . there. . . .

MONTREDON

Better lift her up.

SAINT-GALLET

No, this way . . . so. . . .

[*They raise the body;* MONTREDON *takes one of the dead girl's hands and lays it without a word in* SAINT-GALLET'S.]

SAINT-GALLET

Yes . . . it is all over.

MONTREDON

Long ago.

LARNAUDY

[*With a look of the deepest concern somewhat overdone in the circumstances.*] Gentlemen, your hats.

[*The three men take off their hats.*]

DUENNA

[*Weeping.*] Poor Juliet!

HE

[*Still motionless on the floor.*] Get out of here, you scum!

[*The men turn round.*]

MONTREDON

[*Pointing to the body.*] You?

HE

Who else do you think?

SAINT-GALLET

You hear that; he confesses!

LARNAUDY

Gentlemen, which of us shall go for the police?

SAINT-GALLET

I will. [*He hastens out.*]

HE

Leave me alone with her.

LARNAUDY

[*In the voice with which he unmasks traitors on the stage.*] Never! We are guarding the exits.

HE

You fools!

LARNAUDY

[*To* MONTREDON, *aside.*] He doesn't look as though he even understands. Ah, liquor! [*He goes over to* HE.] Look, miserable drunkard! Look at her!

Our beloved comrade, in the prime of her youth and talent and beauty—look at her!

DUENNA

[*Weeping.*] Poor Juliet!

[THE INGÉNUE *is weeping also.* MONTREDON *dries his eyes.* HE *remains impassive.*]

HE

I don't know who it was that said "For each man kills the thing he loves." . . . Yes, or the thing he loves kills him; one or the other is bound to happen; it's only a matter of time.

MONTREDON

What is he talking about? [LARNAUDY *taps his forehead.*]

HE

[*Calmly, as though debating with himself.*] Montredon loved his art once, but he wrung its neck with his own hands. . . . Yes. . . . And Larnaudy, glory was what he loved, but glory strangled him long ago with general utility—a curious death when you come to think of it. . . . All the way down to poor Madame Gueuroz who loved tragedy in her youth; ah, yes! And tragedy has had its revenge like the rest. And as for life itself, you poor puppets, maybe it is because you love it so well that it enjoys destroying you by slow and gradual degrees; from exhaustion to exhaustion; from season to season, from tour to tour. Your love kills you or you kill your love; you can't get away from that.

LARNAUDY

Feigning madness will not help; you won't save yourself by this play-acting.

HE

Get out of the way—I can't see her. Let me say good-bye to her. [HE *drags himself over to the bed.*]

DUENNA

[*Weeping.*] Poor Juliet!

HE

[*Struggling with his tears.*] Good-bye, darling. I will not cry over you; I will not think your shoulders are cold and your little hands quite stiff already. I will not ask you to forgive me—I know you are not blaming me at all. I was drunk and out of my mind. I don't know what force raised up my hand against you; it just happened. And yet it was an act of wisdom after all. We shall suffer no more, my darling; we shall not grow old like the rest of these people in want and weariness down to sixty years and the poorhouse. I brought you death; I don't know what it is, but oh! it cannot be more dreadful than this life.

MONTREDON

[*Aside.*] He is revolting.

HE

[*After long contemplating her body; in the grip of fierce emotion.*] Darling; you loved me so . . . there is so much love still in your eyes. I wonder . . . here comes a fresh doubt to torture my mind, more fearful

than all the others . . . your eyes seem to know, to understand things now. . . . What if hope were not the fool's delusion I always believed it to be? What if better times might still have come? Are you looking back upon our sufferings? Do you understand them now? And the infinite, which we sought in poverty and squalor; has that too been revealed to you at last? [HE *pauses anxiously.*] Or have you perhaps no memories, no consciousness at all? Are you not rather standing on a shore where a different world begins, or at the first day of another life?

MONTREDON

Let's get him away from her, and have done with this.

LARNAUDY

You can't stay here, you know.

HE

I know. . . . I know.

LARNAUDY

Your conduct is absolutely indecent.

MONTREDON

Get up and stop talking.

LARNAUDY

[*In majestic indignation.*] If your heart is too much hardened to shed a tear upon the remains of her whom . . . [*He hesitates.*] of her who . . . in short if you cannot weep for her, at least you can respect the last repose of her . . . for whom . . . [*He stammers and pretends that emotion renders him inarticulate.*]

HE

[*Huddled against the foot of the bed.*] There is no prompter for this act, my poor Larnaudy; no book, no text. Nothing at all to show which way you go.

LARNAUDY

We have heard enough of your blasphemies. Be silent.

[*Footsteps and voices are heard on the stairs.*]

MONTREDON

Here come the police.

LARNAUDY

[*Recovering all his authority.*] Go and tell them the assassin is in my hands. [MONTREDON *goes out. The* DUENNA *and the* INGENUE *fall back. To* HE.] Get ready to go with them.

HE

I am ready.

LARNAUDY

Then get up.

HE

[*Feeling in his pocket.*] Never mind.

MONTREDON'S VOICE

[*On the landing.*] This way, please.

LARNAUDY

Do you want them to drag you away? Can't you even go to prison like a man?

HE

To prison? [HE *takes the weapon out of his pocket and presses it against his breast.* HE *gazes before him with an expression of avid curiosity.*] I think not. . . .

LARNAUDY

[*Rushing forward, with an exclamation borrowed from one of his plays.*] Wretched man, what are you doing? [*But* HE *has fired. He collapses head foremost, and at the same instant, there comes through the open window, the exultant music of the bells.*]

LARNAUDY

[*To the* COMMISSIONER OF POLICE *who appears at the door, followed by* SAINT-GALLET *and* MONTREDON.] Commissioner, the assassin has brought himself to justice!

COMMISSIONER

[*Bending over* HE.] Why didn't you disarm him?

LARNAUDY

[*In surprised alarm.*] Why sir, I had no idea I was supposed to do that. . . .

MONTREDON

There's no great harm done as it is, you know.

SAINT-GALLET

He was of no account, anyway.

INGENUE

A rotten bully, that's what he was, commissioner. I warned Juliet it would come to a bad end. If she'd

only have listened to me. . . . [SAINT-GALLET *silences her with a motion of the hand.*]

COMMISSIONER

[*Straightening up.*] He is dead.

MONTREDON

[*Aside to* LARNAUDY, *moving towards the exit.*] We take the mid-day train. [*Same to* SAINT-GALLET.] The mid-day train. [*To the* INGENUE *in the doorway.*] You go and learn your part; you play in her place to-night. [*He attempts to leave, but the* COMMISSIONER, *notebook and pencil in hand, calls him back.*]

COMMISSIONER

No; let nobody leave this room. Witnesses first.
[*The men exchange angry glances.*]

DUENNA

[*Sobbing.*] And they have not even closed her eyes.
[*She puts down her dog's basket, goes over to the bed and closes Juliet's eyes. The* COMMISSIONER, *who was preparing to write, puts down his book and watches her with formal deference.*]

COMMISSIONER

Which of you was the first to come in here?

LARNAUDY

I, sir.

COMMISSIONER

Your name?

LARNAUDY

Larnaudy; spelt with a "y."

COMMISSIONER

[*Writing.*] Profession?

LARNAUDY

Dramatic artist.

COMMISSIONER

[*Writing.*] Age?

LARNAUDY

Thirty-nine years.

COMMISSIONER

[*Looks at him, then goes on.*] Now tell me what you saw.

LARNAUDY

[*Importantly.*] This is how it was. I had just left my room and was going downstairs on my way to the station, when, as I passed the door of her room. . .

[*The* COMMISSIONER *writes on. The Curtain falls while* LARNAUDY *continues his peroration.*]

TIME IS A DREAM

A PLAY IN SIX SCENES

CHARACTERS

Riemke van Eyden

Romée Cremers

Mrs. Beunke

Nico van Eyden

Saidyah

FIRST SCENE

The drawing-room of an old mansion in Utrecht. On the left three violet-tinted windows form a deep bay looking out over luxuriantly wooded grounds. On the right a peat fire is burning in the monumental hearth, on either side of which is a comfortable settee [built-in.] piled up with cushions. A lamp-stand nearby. Grey hangings. Sarongs. Antique furniture. A tea table. A telephone on a stand.

Doors rear and left.

Three o'clock of an autumn afternoon. The curtain rises on RIEMKE VAN EYDEN *arranging flowers in a vase. She is a girl of twenty-five, with a gentle, slightly spinsterish manner, but her gown, for all its simplicity, conveys a hint of demure and old-world coquetry.*

MRS. BEUNKE, *the housekeeper, enters, rear, a little frail old lady, elaborately dressed in the fashion of a bygone day.*

MRS. BEUNKE

The train is due at half past four, isn't it, Miss Riemke?

RIEMKE

Yes, Mrs. Beunke.

MRS. BEUNKE

I have told Jan to get the carriage ready by a quarter past. Is that early enough?

RIEMKE

Quite. I shall not be going to the station. Miss Romée called up to say she would be over in a few minutes.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Bringing out her account-book.*] Please, Miss Riemke, could you spare a minute now to go over my accounts?

RIEMKE

Later on, Mrs. Beunke, later on.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*A note of anxiety in her voice.*] This makes three days since you have looked at them. It is a great responsibility for me.

RIEMKE

Very well, I really will go over them for you tomorrow.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Putting the book back into her pocket.*] Thank you, Miss Riemke. And, Oh yes! Shall I bring tea as soon as Miss Romée comes or will you wait for Mr. Nico?

RIEMKE

I don't know; we'll see. [*Looking at* MRS. BEUNKE.] Why, Mrs. Beunke, how flustered you are over Nico's arrival.

MRS. BEUNKE

Well, I have to make sure that everything is just right. I wonder if I've forgotten anything. I have put flowers

in his room; I wish they'd been chrysanthemums, but there's not one left in the hot-house; I could find nothing but dahlias.

RIEMKE

That doesn't matter—I'm afraid chrysanthemums or dahlias or any other of our Dutch flowers will look all alike to him; they will all seem very ordinary after the flowers of Java. You haven't forgotten Saidyah's room, have you?

MRS. BEUNKE

No, Miss Riemke, I have prepared the room he had before. I have had the bed taken out and mats put down everywhere. [*With deep distaste.*] You may believe me or not, Miss Riemke, but the mat he slept on ten years ago still smells of him.

RIEMKE

You mustn't be hard on him, Mrs Beunke. My brother doesn't look upon him as a servant, you know, but as a friend and confidant rather.

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, I know. It was just the same before, but what a young man of good family can possibly find to talk about to a nigger is a thing I never could understand.

RIEMKE

[*Smiling.*] Nico likes the natives. In Java when he was little, he was forever running away to the boys' quarters at the other end of the garden; and as a fresh case of cholera broke out amongst them pretty nearly every day, those escapades of his used to keep Mother in a perpetual state of panic.

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes; diseases—that's about all you can expect to get from those creatures.

RIEMKE

Saidyah would lay down his life for Nico without an instant's hesitation or a word of complaint.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Sighing.*] I know, but if only he would learn not to squat on the furniture to smoke his pipe and stop spitting under the carpets!

RIEMKE

[*Setting the vase on the mantlepiece.*] There, that's finished!

[*She sits down.* MRS. BEUNKE *does likewise.*]

MRS. BEUNKE

How did you find Mr. Nico, Miss Riemke?

RIEMKE

A little depressed, of course. When one has been living in the Tropics, you know—

MRS. BEUNKE

Was he glad to see Holland again?

RIEMKE

Yes. But I think he still dreads it in a way.

MRS. BEUNKE

Did he mention his illness?

RIEMKE

No—it is still a painful subject with him. But I am sure he remembers every detail of it.

MRS. BEUNKE

After all these years, too!

RIEMKE

Oh, he has an extraordinarily vivid memory. Yesterday he was recalling to me incidents of our childhood which had almost faded out of my mind. He told me that when we came from the East I was so weak that Mother had to carry me in her arms and they are supposed to have fed me on raw eggs beaten up and flavored with vanilla. Is that true?

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, you were as yellow as a Chinese baby and you used to stare so inquisitively at everyone with great big eyes all ringed round with the fever—I can see you now.

RIEMKE

And he used to run about the house in his little Javanese costume that the gardener's children always laughed at. He remembers to this day how their jeering used to hurt him. Even at that age he was oversensitive.

MRS. BEUNKE

What news did he bring you of Mr. and Mrs. van Eyden, Miss Riemke?

RIEMKE

They are both well, thank you, Mrs. Beunke. They have grown rather stouter and paler, Nico says, but that's always the way in hot climates unless one leads a very active life. Father only goes to his office two hours a day now and Mother hardly stirs out at all any more. She moves around as little as possible. Nico described her so well; I could see the whole picture of the rooms with the shutters always closed, and Mother in her white linen wrap, sitting there almost immovably, only now and then lifting her hand to feel the beads of perspiration that break out on her forehead where the hair is just beginning to turn grey. She is used to my being away. I think her mind has settled into a deep calm that is almost like vacancy.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*With emotion.*] How sad it is, though, Miss Riemke. Why couldn't God will that the whole family should come together just once more?

RIEMKE

Later on, Mrs. Beunke, later on. In a few years' time my people will be leaving the Indies for good and come back to settle here. Then this house will come alive again.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Sighing.*] Yes, but then Mr. Nico will have gone. I have always thought he would not stay with us more than two or three months at a time. And when he leaves everything will be lonely again until your people come.

RIEMKE

Well, Mrs. Beunke, and what if it is? Isn't solitude nice to sleep in? Perhaps it isn't wise to ask any more of life than simply to be allowed to doze one's days and years away.

MRS. BEUNKE

Goodness me, Miss Riemke, you surely don't call it unwise to hope to grow old amongst your dear ones.

RIEMKE

It might be, Mrs. Beunke. Affection is very exhausting, you know, and none of us has very much strength if the truth were known. The clock striking, a few telephone calls, and your little household duties are enough to agitate and tire you out, and as for me, why if I had more burden of affection laid upon me, I think I should find it very hard to carry. I'm growing into a real old maid, Mrs. Beunke, I ought to be loving a parrot or a goldfish now. Love of human beings is too wearing.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Rising.*] I can hear the carriage coming. I'll go and tell Jan not to wait for you.

[*She goes out left, and almost immediately* ROMÉE CREMERS *comes in. She is a girl of twenty-three, tall and straight, and carries her head with a touch of pride. Her clear features look as though they have been sculptured out of the firm and radiant flesh. The expression of her grey eyes and the somewhat fantastic charm of manner betray an impulsive and passionate nature. She is wearing a sports suit.*]

ROMÉE

Hullo, dear. Well, is he here?

RIEMKE

Not yet, but he will be soon.

ROMÉE

Didn't you bring him back with you from Rotterdam?

RIEMKE

No. He brought some important message from my father for the directors of his company and thought he had better get that disposed of first.

ROMÉE

[*Sitting down.*] I walked over by the lake path and I feel rather tired.

RIEMKE

[*Looking at her.*] You look tired; you're quite pale. You aren't ill, are you?

ROMÉE

No, it's nothing at all. Don't bother about it. How did you find him?

RIEMKE

[*Eagerly.*] Oh, wonderfully well.

ROMÉE

Did he enjoy the voyage?

RIEMKE

Yes, especially India. He stayed there several months.

ROMÉE

I'm sure I shan't know him again. He was a boy when he went away and it will be very strange to find in his place a man who has become, after all, a perfect stranger although one still calls him by his first name.

RIEMKE

[*Again studying her face.*] Why, darling, you do look ill. Aren't you feeling any better yet?

ROMÉE

Yes, a little.

RIEMKE

Would you like some tea?

ROMÉE

No, thanks.

RIEMKE

Please tell me what is the matter.

ROMÉE

I told you, I'm tired—it came over me all of a sudden as I was walking along by the water.

RIEMKE

It's only twenty minutes' walk from your place here. That little distance couldn't possibly . . .

ROMÉE

No, it wasn't the walk—. I don't know what caused it, but a kind of heaviness came over me all at once quite without warning, a queer feeling of exhaustion, don't

you know. [*A pause—her eyes search* RIEMKE's *face.*] Riemke, if I tell you a secret, can I absolutely rely on you to keep it to yourself?

RIEMKE

Of course you can, but why all the mystery?

ROMÉE

Because I should hate the thing I'm going to tell you to be talked about and discussed and made a peg to hang theories on. Something very strange and unaccountable has happened to me—I was walking quietly along the path by the lake, when, just as I came to the little white wicket at the end of your grounds, I was seized by that weariness I spoke of. Of course I know that it was only that the walk had tired me more than usual but I couldn't make out why I felt so extraordinarily and unreasonably depressed. At the same moment everything around took on an unnatural appearance, horrible because of its unnaturalness; you know what I mean? The trees along the opposite edge of the lake went quite flat and lifeless, like trees on a piece of tapestry, there was no more play of light and shade and not the faintest breath of wind. It was all intensely still and unpleasant. My limbs seemed to grow heavier every moment and each step I took was more difficult than the last; I was conscious of something uncanny, yes, and terrifying, in the air, when a slight mist began to envelop the lake and I saw all at once in the water to the left of me, a man's head. He wasn't very far from the bank and I saw his face quite distinctly; I should recognize it in a thousand.

RIEMKE

It couldn't have been anybody bathing—the water is dangerous at this time of year.

ROMÉE

That's what I said to myself at once. No, that man was drowning, and in a few seconds his head had vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

RIEMKE

Didn't you shout for someone to come? Didn't you call for help?

ROMÉE

I couldn't. Besides I knew it would have been useless.

RIEMKE

How do you mean, you knew?

ROMÉE

Just that. The man was no more than ten yards from the bank and yet I had a feeling he was actually ever so far away and that nobody could possibly have reached him.

RIEMKE

And then?

ROMÉE

That is all. The fear and the queer feeling of heaviness left me, the mist melted way, the trees and every-

thing looked natural again and I came into your garden. Now, what do you understand by that?

RIEMKE

No more than you do—and there is one thing especially that puzzles me—you say that everything around you looked unnatural, and yet you describe it in such detail. Do you think the man was real or did you just see him in a sort of hallucination—you know what I mean, one of those waking dreams one hears about?

ROMÉE

Oh no, I wasn't dreaming. It all looked perfectly real.

RIEMKE

You said there was a mist but there hasn't been any mist today.

ROMÉE

Yes there has. Just a slight one that came up and was gone again in a moment—what you call a sea-flame.

RIEMKE

I suppose I didn't notice it.

ROMÉE

And my mind was so clear that I noticed at once the alterations you have made down there.

RIEMKE

What alterations?

ROMÉE

Why, the reeds, for one thing. You have had them cut down all along the edge of the lake.

RIEMKE

[*In amazement.*] What are you talking about, Romée? We haven't had the reeds cut down at all.

ROMÉE

But, my dear, of course you have—at the entrance to your grounds. There's not a single one left.

RIEMKE

Romée, I assure you you're mistaken. Are you sure you mean our bank?

ROMÉE

Yes, near the white wicket.

RIEMKE

The reeds haven't been cut down there—or anywhere else—since this place belonged to us.

ROMÉE

I can't make it out. And haven't you got a boat down there? A green boat?

RIEMKE

Not any kind of boat.

ROMÉE

Let's go and make sure.

RIEMKE

We don't need to go, we can see from here. Look.

ROMÉE

[*Standing in the bay-window.*] You are right. The reeds are there again, just as they were before.

RIEMKE

Just as they have always been.

ROMÉE

And no boat. [*A frightened pause.*] I must have had—what you said—a kind of hallucination. And yet I did see—

RIEMKE

[*Thoughtfully.*] Yes, you certainly saw—

ROMÉE

That boat was real, so were the seats, and the oars—and that face was real.

RIEMKE

When you thought the man was drowning, you didn't call for help, you said, because you had "a feeling that nobody could possibly have reached him."

ROMÉE

Yes, it was the strangest thing. I saw him quite near me, and I knew him to be an enormous distance away.

RIEMKE

Suppose that that distance was not in space but in time?

ROMÉE

How do you mean, in time?

RIEMKE

Suppose you had seen that spot not as it is now, but as it was once, long ago?

ROMÉE

And the man?

RIEMKE

The man might have lived long ago, too. He might have gone in bathing and got drowned.

ROMÉE

I don't believe in ghosts.

RIEMKE

You know Charlotte Brandes, don't you?

ROMÉE

Yes, I met her here.

RIEMKE

Well, one evening she was walking in her garden in Gelderland, when she noticed the summer-house was all lit up. She went towards it, very curious to know what was going on inside, and when she looked through the blue latticed windows, she saw a whole company of people at the table, an entire family dressed in the costumes of a hundred years ago, quietly having tea.

ROMÉE

What did she do?

RIEMKE

She had the presence of mind to go back five minutes later, with the servants, but the summer-house was

empty and the lock had not been touched. They made an investigation but it led to nothing.

ROMÉE

How does she account for the apparition, then?

RIEMKE

She doesn't account for it at all, but it made her think that human beings may leave behind them imprints on their surroundings, as it were, which possibly sometimes reappear, so that what she saw there may have been one whole moment out of the past revealing itself to her intact.

ROMÉE

Did she ever see anything like it again?

RIEMKE

No, never.

ROMÉE

And didn't it unhinge her mind?

RIEMKE

Unhinge her mind? Why, she's the most level-headed woman I know.

[MRS. BEUNKE *enters, rear, carrying a copper pail filled with the coals upon which the tea-kettle is set. The girls say no more until she has left the room.*]

ROMÉE

Couldn't this be investigated too, without anybody knowing?

RIEMKE

One might question Mrs. Beunke.

ROMÉE

Has she been long in this house?

RIEMKE

Nearly forty years. She was in the service of the old owners. She has a great store of information.

ROMÉE

How could I get her to talk?

RIEMKE

That is easy.

[MRS. BEUNKE *comes in again with a silver tray containing the tea-service and cakes.*]

Mrs. Beunke will you have tea with us?

MRS. BEUNKE

Thank you, Miss Riemke. Are you not going to wait for Mr. Nico?

RIEMKE

No, Miss Romée feels cold. [MRS. BEUNKE *fills the teapot.*] Mrs. Beunke, we were just talking about the Van Asbecks who lived here before we came, and Miss Romée was asking whether they had any children. Do you know?

MRS. BEUNKE

No, Miss Romée, they died childless and it was a great pity, for the Van Asbeck family was one of the best in the province.

ROMÉE

Were you with them long?

MRS. BEUNKE

More than fifteen years, Miss Romée.

ROMÉE

Will you pour out the tea, please?

[MRS. B. *pours the tea and hands the sugar round.*]

ROMÉE

[*Helping herself.*] Thank you.

RIEMKE

Has the house changed much since their time?

MRS. BEUNKE

No, Miss Riemke; except the outbuildings and the terrace along the north wing that your father built.

ROMÉE

And the grounds?

MRS. BEUNKE

They have not changed, either. The trees have grown taller—that is all.

RIEMKE

And the reeds?

MRS. BEUNKE

The reeds, Miss Riemke?

RIEMKE

Were there as many then as there are now?

MRS. BEUNKE

Oh no! Mrs. Van Asbeck had them cut down. She thought it looked more genteel.

[*The girls exchange glances.*]

RIEMKE

So the shore of the lake was quite clear then?

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, Miss Riemke, quite clear.

RIEMKE

It must have been much more convenient for fishing boating—I suppose they did have a boat.

MRS. BEUNKE

No; Mr. and Mrs. Van Asbeck did not boat or fish.

ROMÉE

Didn't they bathe in their lake either?

MRS. BEUNKE

No, Miss Romée.

RIEMKE

And didn't anyone else bathe there?

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, indeed, Miss Riemke—Mr. Henry [*She pauses; then gets up from her chair.*] I think I hear the carriage coming.

RIEMKE

Stay where you are, Mrs. Beunke, I'll go. [*She hastens out, left.*]

ROMÉE

Mr. Henry, you were saying—

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, Mr. Van Asbeck's nephew. He was a powerful swimmer and he used to swim in the lake every day all through the summer.

ROMÉE

Oh?

MRS. BEUNKE

But Mrs. Van Asbeck did not quite approve of it, so when it came time for Mr. Henry's swim, she used to have her blinds pulled down.

ROMÉE

What for?

MRS. BEUNKE

Why, for the sake of modesty, Miss Romée.

ROMÉE

[*Pretending to summon some recollection to mind.*] Henry van Asbeck—let me see—didn't I hear somewhere that he was drowned?

MRS. BEUNKE

Oh no, Miss Romée; he is still alive.

ROMÉE

' Really?

MRS. BEUNKE

You must be thinking of the accident that happened to him.

ROMÉE

Here?

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, in the lake.

ROMÉE

What was it?

MRS. BEUNKE

He was seized with cramp not far from the shore—fortunately they heard him call out.

ROMÉE

Was that very long ago?

MRS. BEUNKE

Oh yes, more than thirty years. [*Sound of voices outside.*] Ah, here comes Mr. Nico!

[NICO *comes rapidly into the room, left, followed by* RIEMKE *and* SAIDYAH. *He is a young man, twenty-five years of age, clean shaven and excessively pale, with unquiet eyes and the nervous, sudden gestures characteristic of lonely people in the momentary excitement of a departure or an arrival.* SAIDYAH *is a copper-skinned Javanese, past fifty. He is dressed in a European coat and a*

sarong, and wears a turban. He is carrying a voluminous bundle wrapped in a bright-coloured cloth.]

NICO

[*Warmly grasping both* ROMÉE's *hands.*] Why, here's our dear Romée!

ROMÉE

[*Whose eyes, since the moment he entered, have been fixed in stunned incredulity upon his face.*] Oh, how do you do?

SAIDYAH

[*Greeting* ROMÉE *in oriental fashion.*] I greet you, Nonna Cremers. [*She returns the salutation with a nod.*] [*He greets* MRS. BEUNKE.] How are you, Nonna Beunke? You have not changed, you know—

MRS. BEUNKE

[*With friendliness.*] Nor have you, Saidyah.

SAIDYAH

Ah yes, I have, Mother. Ten years ago I was still a hunter, beating the tiger out of the bush, but you were already quite old then, and wrinkled and little.

NICO

[*To* ROMÉE.] It *is* good to see you again, Romée.

ROMÉE

It is good to see you too, Nico.

RIEMKE

[*To* NICO.] Well, would you have known her again?

NICO

No, I don't believe I should.

RIEMKE

[*To* ROMÉE.] Would you?

ROMÉE

[*Throwing off her torpor.*] Why, yes, of course I should, at once.

RIEMKE

Come, Mrs. Beunke, give him some tea, will you?

CURTAIN

SECOND SCENE

The drawing-room. A blazing fire of pine logs. It is eleven o'clock in the morning, but the sky is so heavily overcast and the fog clings so persistently to the windows, that the room is in semi-darkness. ROMÉE *has just arrived, and* NICO *is helping her off with her raincoat.*

NICO

I call it really heroic of you to come out in weather like this.

ROMÉE

Why? I love fogs.

NICO

[*Leading her to the fire.*] Come over here and get dry.

ROMÉE

Isn't Riemke down yet?

NICO

Oh yes; she is leaving us alone on purpose.

ROMÉE

[*Sitting down.*] Do you think she is getting used to the idea of our leaving her?

NICO

She is resigning herself to it; I doubt whether she is still capable of suffering very keenly. She lives in dread of sorrow, you know, and protects herself against it in advance so that when it does come, it finds her heart already benumbed—anaesthetized, you might call it.

ROMÉE

All the same, I should feel happier if we could take her with us.

NICO

That is absolutely out of the question. She has never been able to stand the climate of the East Indies. The fever seized on her down there at once and for always, and although she used to play about and laugh and chatter like the other children, one knew that terrible fever-heat was inwardly consuming her all the while. It was as though a shaft of the sun itself had struck right into her body and was drying it up little by little.

ROMÉE

She was a child then and the fever is very hard on one at that age; but now—

NICO

No. You don't know what frail threads her life hangs upon—she will never be able to live out of this country. If she had to say good-bye to this stupor-stricken landscape and the fogs overhanging these waterways, it would simply kill her, Romée. She draws her life from the very things that are death to me.

ROMÉE

What things are death to you, my dearest?

NICO

Oh, you know. These grey mists that go sweeping across the country week in and week out; the rain that's half fog and the fog that's already rain—I feel myself going to pieces under it.

ROMÉE

[*Smiling.*] How funny you are, you two—forever analysing the weather and blessing or railing at the sky. Why, I never look at it; I don't give it even a passing thought.

NICO

I know it's not very strong-minded or very intelligent to be so much at the mercy of a more or less generous supply of light, but what can one do if one's made that way? In our family we are all exceedingly sensitive to the influence of the weather.

ROMÉE

Do you know what I was thinking just now? Why shouldn't we be married here in the house instead of in Java as you have planned? It would mean so much to Riemke, dear, and I know she wouldn't mind so dreadfully then if we left her afterwards.

NICO

[*Sharply.*] No, no! Not here!

ROMÉE

Why not?

NICO

Because when a great happiness is coming to one,

one should receive it in the midst of beauty. In this place happiness is faded before it comes, withered before it has had time to flower.

ROMÉE

Very well, you shall have it as you want it—don't let us say any more about it.

NICO

Do you feel warmer now?

ROMÉE

I wasn't cold before; you always think I'm cold.

NICO

[*Taking up an album.*] Look, I have found the photographs we were speaking of yesterday.

ROMÉE

[*Eagerly.*] Oh, do show them to me.

NICO

[*He lights the lamp.*] Eleven o'clock in the morning and dark already.

[*An intimate glow is shed over the room and outside the day looks bleaker by contrast. The two young people turn over the pages of the album.*]

ROMÉE

What are all those strange-looking plants?

NICO

That is a corner of the forest behind my people's house. [*Showing her other photographs.*] Here is the

harbor—and the river—and here's a rice-field—this is our house. The sea is quite near; you can see it from the verandah, blazing beyond you like a furnace of blue; they moor the little Malay boats by the stern and at low tide you see them rise and fall almost imperceptibly as though they were trying to breathe. [*He turns a page.*] The garden—the river—here's a rice-field.

ROMÉE

Oh!

NICO

Every afternoon the wind lifts dense purple clouds behind the banyans and the perfume of the flowers is so heavy and sweet that it seems to weigh down the air.

ROMÉE

It is a perfect paradise!

NICO

You often see the fronds of the tree-ferns spread out against golden mists, like delicate lace they look, and in the heart of a leaf a single ear lifts its slender stalk high above all the rest, like a soft, hairy snake. A human figure gleams through the bamboos—and infinite small creatures send up a tenuous music from the earth. When you have been there, you will realize how impossible it is ever to live anywhere else.

ROMÉE

[*Leaning close to his side.*] When I think that all this is to be *our* place, Nico, *our* home, I can hardly bear the time that lies between us and such happiness. But so

long as you were with me, my dear, I should be content to live beside the dismallest canal in Holland—I would live *anywhere* with you.

NICO

[*Rising.*] No—not anywhere; don't say that. With a roof like this shut down upon you always, how can you possibly forget?

ROMÉE

Forget what?

NICO

[*Pacing the floor.*] What every one of us must learn to forget. Our destiny, our fate, the idea that although we might at a stretch believe ourselves free in space, we know we are the prisoners of time. In Java you do learn after a while to put all that out of your mind.

ROMÉE

It is never in mine.

NICO

You are too young. It is a thing that dawns on one suddenly when one gets to be about thirty. One day in Ceylon I was alone on a mountain-top. A rose-coloured haze lay upon the rocks and the sun was going down into a great abyss of light. Suddenly my ear caught a sound, an unaccountable sound; it seemed to come right out of the sun; it sounded very sweet and steady and rather loud, and in a few moments it had stopped. It didn't die away, but broke off clean, as though some task it had been given to fulfil was done and finished.

ROMÉE

What could it have been?

NICO

What was it actually? That I don't know, but to me it was a symbol of life.

ROMÉE

How do you mean?

NICO

A symbol of human life—an unaccountable harmony resounding for a few moments and ceasing at a given time, fixed in advance.

ROMÉE

Fixed in advance?

NICO

Yes—a chord of music doomed, in spite of its loveliness and purity, to be cut off at one stroke, without reason or warning. Ah, Romée, the instant that exquisite note was silent, I understood the whole ruthless, futile stupidity of the laws of life.

ROMÉE

[*Thoughtfully.*] Nico, is what you are saying possible, is it certain?

NICO

What?

ROMÉE

That the length of our lives can be measured out in advance, just like a reel of cotton or a roll of cloth?

NICO

Why not?

ROMÉE

It would be too horrible.

NICO

Yes, if people knew the number and order of the hours before them; fortunately though, they don't.

ROMÉE

They couldn't possibly know, could they?

NICO

Some people say they could.

ROMÉE

Who?

NICO

The initiates, for instance; in India—I have met some of them.

RIEMKE

[*Coming in hesitantly, right.*] Oh, Romée, you're here—good morning.

ROMÉE

Hullo, dear.

RIEMKE

I am so sorry to disturb you both—

ROMÉE

Why, Riemke, as though you could—

RIEMKE

But the architect is here, Nico.

NICO

Good. I want to see him.

ROMÉE

Are you building?

NICO

No—only freshening this old place up a bit.

RIEMKE

[*Smiling.*] He thinks I will live less cheerlessly if he has the house done up.

NICO

That wall staring like a haggard face at you through the trees was beginning to get on my nerves. And the garden was growing into a positive wilderness. Didn't you notice the beeches as you came down, Romée?

ROMÉE

Yes, and it made me very sad, too. There were five or six men cutting them down.

NICO

But they threw the whole of the north wing into the shade, like an everlasting green twilight all the day long; you couldn't breathe in those rooms any more. You have to let the daylight in, you know. [*Going out.*] I'll be right back.

ROMÉE

[*Putting her arms around* RIEMKE.] Happiness is an awful thing, Riemke. For years you and I have never passed a single day without seeing each other and now in a few weeks' time there will be four thousand miles between us. And I'm not even sad about it—it doesn't make me cry—it doesn't hurt to think of.

RIEMKE

It doesn't make me cry either—no, it doesn't hurt much. Please don't let's talk about it. [ROMÉE *kisses her.*]

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Coming in, left.*] Good-morning, Miss Romée.

ROMÉE

How are you, Mrs. Beunke?

RIEMKE

What is it, Mrs. Beunke?

MRS. BEUNKE

The men are asking for their coffee, Miss Riemke. Shall I give it to them?

RIEMKE

Have they finished their work?

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, Miss Riemke, behind the house, and they have finished down by the lake, too.

RIEMKE

What have they been doing there?

MRS. BEUNKE

Mr. Nico gave orders to have all the reeds cut down. [ROMÉE *gets up.*]

RIEMKE

Oh, I didn't know that. [*She goes to the bay-window and stands there while looking out—then turns round.*] Give them their coffee, Mrs. Beunke.

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, Miss Riemke.

[*A reddish sunlight is trying timidly to force a way through the fog.* MRS. BEUNKE *switches off the light as she leaves the room.* ROMÉE *goes over to the window and stands there horror-stricken. At* RIEMKE'S *touch upon her shoulder she shudders.*]

ROMÉE

[*Whispering.*] I can't understand it—not one reed left, and that grey water right up to the edge—now the place looks exactly as I saw it three months ago.

RIEMKE

I think—wasn't there something else then, a boat?

ROMÉE

Yes—but that's of no importance—everything else—Riemke, where did Nico get the idea of cutting down the rushes?

RIEMKE

I don't know at all.

ROMÉE

Didn't he say anything about it to you?

RIEMKE

No, not a word.

ROMÉE

And you have never told him what happened to me down there?

RIEMKE

Never.

ROMÉE

[*Pointing to the lake.*] Then how do you explain that?

RIEMKE

Why, I don't know—coincidence I dare say. He is making a few alterations about the place. Those grasses had really grown rather thick; he must have noticed it and had them cut down. It seems a perfectly natural thing for him to have done.

ROMÉE

Yes, unless—

RIEMKE

Unless what?

ROMÉE

[*Changing her mind.*] Nothing—just an idea and most likely a very foolish one at that. Leave me alone with him presently. I want to ask him some questions.

RIEMKE

Very well, but take my advice and don't tell him anything about your adventure.

ROMÉE

No, of course I won't.

RIEMKE

It would make a deep impression on him and he would worry over it; we mustn't let him do that; he is in very low spirits as it is.

ROMÉE

Yes, I had noticed that.

NICO

[*Entering, left.*] That fellow's not an architect; he's a bricklayer—he wants to build towers! He doesn't understand that all I want is for the house not to go on looking like a face.

RIEMKE

Did you make that clear to him?

NICO

Yes, and he suggested all sorts of nonsense, when all that's necessary is simply to take away one of the sky-lights and put in one more window on the first floor. They would break up the human symmetry of the wall as it is now.

RIEMKE

Would you like me to speak to him?

NICO

I wish you would, Riemke. [RIEMKE *goes out, right.* NICO *joins* ROMÉE *at the window.*] Do you see that? I've cleared up the edge of the lake—it looks nice, doesn't it?

[*A pause. They return to the hearth.*]

ROMÉE

Nico, you were saying before that you had met some initiates in India—

NICO

Yes.

ROMÉE

Is it true they acquire a knowledge of their destiny?

NICO

I have seen an old priest in Madras who said that he could explore the past at will.

ROMÉE

And the future?

NICO

The future, too. He was a kind of religious philosopher you meet down there—we had several talks together. He had me come and see him on the terrace of his temple at sunset and there he would tell me about his voyages into Time, as we sat looking out over the Indian Ocean.

ROMÉE

How did he learn to penetrate into the past and future?

NICO

By exposing himself on the ground at night and giving himself up to the unknown powers. In that state of suspense, of almost death-like passivity, visions were born in him and he knew they belonged to the future or to the past.

ROMÉE

But what proofs did he have?

NICO

He could find out facts by which to prove the past happenings he witnessed during his experiments.

ROMÉE

And the future?

NICO

That is harder to control, of course. But he showed me a vision of war observed twenty years ago which materialized a little while ago down to the smallest details in an expedition to Afghanistan.

ROMÉE

Then according to him the future is already mapped out ahead?

NICO

He says the past, the present and the future are coexistent.

ROMÉE

It is incomprehensible.

NICO

Obviously; our notion of time prevents our conceiving it. But many other things inconceivable to us, *are*, nevertheless. "Man walks in Time as in a garden; behind him there goes one spreading a veil so that he may not behold the flowers of the past; before him goes one spreading a veil likewise, so that he may not yet behold the flowers of the future. All these flowers, however, bloom at once behind the two veils and the eyes of the initiate contemplate them continually."

ROMÉE

Didn't you ever ask him about yourself and your future?

NICO

I didn't want to—what is the use of worrying oneself needlessly?

ROMÉE

Do you think only the initiate can have these revelations?

NICO

No. There are old peasant women in Brittany who see funerals a year ahead. They can tell you all the people who will be there; women are always more sensitive than we to these emanations of the future.

ROMÉE

What a wonderful gift to have—

NICO

Wonderful, yes, but barren—

ROMÉE

How do you mean?

NICO

I don't see what good there can be in a gift like that.

ROMÉE

Why, if one were to discover, for instance, that some danger threatened a person, one could warn him against it.

NICO

And then?

ROMÉE

Couldn't the danger be averted?

NICO

No. Seers have never prevented anything. One may know the future, but one can't change it. Time is like a piece of machinery whose working we can neither hold back nor stop.

ROMÉE

Then supposing a woman foresaw a catastrophe hanging over the person she cared most for in the world—her child, say,—she couldn't save it?

NICO

Impossible.

ROMÉE

Then what could she do?

NICO

Nothing. Suffer in silence until the accomplishment of the event.

ROMÉE

That is more than flesh and blood could stand. She would go mad.

NICO

[*Taking her hand.*] Why, Romée, what is the matter? Your hands are all moist and trembling.

ROMÉE

It is the thought that one couldn't do anything—even if one knew—it is awful to think of.

NICO

What an impressionable girl you are—don't let that worry you—we hardly ever do know what we dread to know—

ROMÉE

No, fortunately.

[RIEMKE *enters, rear.*]

NICO

Well, did you make him understand?

RIEMKE

I hope so—he is going to submit you another plan.

NICO

Without towers?

RIEMKE

Yes, he promised that.

NICO

Well, that's something, anyway.

RIEMKE

Mrs. Beunke just told me we could go in to dinner.

NICO

[*Going towards the door, rear.*] All right.
[ROMÉE *signs to* RIEMKE *that she wants to speak to her.* NICO *turns round.*]
Aren't you coming?

RIEMKE

In one moment, Nico. [NICO *goes out.*]

ROMÉE

[*Whispering.*] I understand it now—

RIEMKE

[*In the same tone.*] What?

ROMÉE

The thing that happened to me down by the lake—and the reeds—and everything.

RIEMKE

Well?

ROMÉE

First I want to tell you one thing I have kept from you up to now for fear of the shock it might give you; but today you have got to know. Riemke, the face that appeared to me on the water that day was Nico's face!

RIEMKE

[*In horror.*] Nico's?

ROMÉE

When he came into the room half an hour afterwards, I recognized him at once.

RIEMKE

It is absurd, Romée—it is impossible.

ROMÉE

It is true. And now I am certain that my vision had nothing to do with the past—but with the future.

RIEMKE

What do you say?

ROMÉE

I say that little by little this landscape is changing, Riemke, and it is not going back to what it was before our time but towards what it is going to be like one day.

[*A pause.*]

NICO'S VOICE

Aren't you girls coming in to dinner?

RIEMKE

[*Answering.*] Yes, yes, we're coming.

[*They exchange a look of understanding and go out.*]

CURTAIN

THIRD SCENE

The drawing-room. A radiant summer afternoon: MRS. BEUNKE *is asleep in a chair, her account-book in her lap.*

NICO *and* ROMÉE *enter, arm in arm.*

ROMÉE

[*Laughing.*] Oh look, Mrs, Beunke has fallen asleep.

NICO

Yes, she often does that nowadays.

ROMÉE

She is getting old.

NICO

It isn't age.

ROMÉE

Is she ill?

NICO

Not more so than usual. Living is what ails her. She only weighs about eighty pounds and yet she finds it exceedingly difficult to move her tiny person. She worries horribly over getting tea, and settling her accounts, and eliminating dust. The weight of these immense responsibilities is too much for her. She tries to escape them by going to church because she falls asleep

as soon as she gets settled in her pew. She cries, too, now and then. Life is too heavy for her.

[MRS. BEUNKE *wakes up.*]

NICO

Hullo, Mrs. Beunke.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Uneasily.*] Oh, Mr. Nico!

NICO

Still tired?

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Agitated.*] I wasn't asleep, Mr. Nico—I—I was reckoning up my accounts in my head.

NICO

[*Indulgently.*] All right, all right—don't worry—go on resting. [MRS. BEUNKE *goes out, right.*] Haven't you noticed that lots of people here can't stand the weight of life?

ROMÉE

Not only here.

NICO

But here especially.

ROMÉE

What is the reason, do you think?

NICO

I don't know, the sky perhaps—perhaps the water.

ROMÉE

[*Watching him.*] The water?

NICO

[*Sitting down.*] The water is dead here—one grows like it, stagnant and choked with weeds. Look at our neighbours; they are no more alive than their houses. They are all so dejected and apathetic—like blighted trees or fungus-eaten walls or canals of stagnant water. This country is really a torment to me.

ROMÉE

[*Tenderly.*] We'll be leaving it very soon now, dear.

NICO

I sometimes wonder whether it isn't too late?

ROMÉE

Too late for what?

NICO

To escape.

ROMÉE

How should it be too late?

NICO

I am not well, Romée; I am certainly not as well as I was when I came. That's not quite right what I said about the water just now. It isn't so much its inanition that spreads to us as the corrosion of its innumerable weeds. You know what I mean, don't you, those lichens and mosses that fasten on to the surface of the water until they cover it entirely from one bank clear

across to the other? I feel like that—grown over and eaten up, suffocated under just such an evil growth of trouble and doubts in my mind.

ROMÉE

But what trouble, my dearest, what doubts?

NICO

Oh, you wouldn't understand if I told you. You'd only laugh at me. Besides I feel myself that all this is unspeakably petty and morbid. But it's a thing of long standing—it nearly killed me when I was fifteen. Afterwards, though, down in Java, it left me again, but now it is all coming back just as it was before. There are days when it takes me by the throat and strangles the life out of me.

ROMÉE

Why did you never speak of it before?

NICO

Because there's nothing to be done for it—I know that perfectly well.

ROMÉE

But what is it about?

NICO

Just scepticism, that's all, doubt of everything,—of life, of things, of myself. When I was a child I thought my existence was an illusion—my sensations didn't seem to give me sufficient proof that I was really in life. A little later, when I took up astronomy, I noticed that the calculations of scholars concerning the course of the

stars were not accurate; mere approximations at best. There was always some error, some uncertainty. So then I began to doubt the existence of the stars themselves. I wondered if they were not merely a kind of stage-setting, you know, an optical illusion, and absolutely unrelated to anything we human beings fancy we know about their distance or their substance or their dimensions. I told that notion of mine to one very learned man and he told me he understood it and didn't think it absurd. That was the year I tried to kill myself.

ROMÉE

[*Startled.*] You tried to kill yourself?

NICO

Oh, not out of despair—curiosity rather, to set my mind finally at peace.

ROMÉE

And you really tried to—

NICO

Yes—

ROMÉE

When?

NICO

Just ten years ago.

ROMÉE

Where?

NICO

Here.

ROMÉE

Oh!

NICO

Nobody knew.

ROMÉE

But someone must have saved you, or did you manage to get back to the bank by yourself?

NICO

[*In astonishment.*] What bank?

ROMÉE

Wasn't it down in the lake?

NICO

No. I hanged myself in the loft, near the middle skylight; the nail is there still. But the rope didn't hold more than a few seconds; it broke and I fainted on the floor. I never tried again.

[*A pause.*]

ROMÉE

Why did you keep it a secret from Riemke?

NICO

Because they would have had me watched; they might have even shut me up. Besides, we left for Java again that time and that's a country where your mind soon finds peace. You don't suffer from the unknowable down there as you do in this place—you accept life—here you repudiate it. You insist on understanding.

[*Bitterly.*] What's the use of understanding? Believing is what we need. We must have faith and a catchword to pin it on; fate, freedom, soul, matter, and such-like—they mean nothing, yet we choose one and keep hold of it. It's the price we pay for peace. My trouble is that I cannot and will not be the dupe of these things.

ROMÉE

[*Putting her arms round him.*] I have learnt something, Nico darling. These mental torments we brood over can only fill the heart to which love has not yet come; at its coming they all vanish away; all of them, even pity, even justice which used to make me suffer terribly at one time. Now I am indifferent to everything that isn't you. You say you love me—do you love me enough?

NICO

My love for you is a torture, Romée.

ROMÉE

What do you mean—a torture?

NICO

[*In a low voice, trying to find the right words.*] Because this bond between us—this power of your nearness over me—what is it? If it were merely desire—everything would be simple and reasonable—but it is with love that the problem begins. That's where the riddle is—there is no answer to it. I believed your beauty held the answer—but it does not. I thought a man might crush his thoughts to death upon your heart—but no—for it is in your arms that I feel most helpless against the bitter and mysterious tide that rises up and

overwhelms me. In your arms words and silence are alike poison—poison—what can it be?

ROMÉE

[*Laying her hand on his forehead.*] Stop looking for the solution, dear—don't be afraid of things; don't think about them any more.

NICO

I can't help it.

ROMÉE

Then if you can't, tell all your thoughts to me, every one of them, even the bitterest and the most morbid. That will be a relief to you. What are you thinking of now?

NICO

We love each other—and yet—

ROMÉE

And yet—?

NICO

We—there's no such thing as we—there's you,—and I,—and I am alone.

CURTAIN

FOURTH SCENE

The drawing-room. Eleven o'clock at night. The room is in darkness except for the moonlight shining through the open bay-windows, beside which RIEMKE *is sitting.*

ROMÉE *comes in, rear. She is wearing her hat and cloak.* RIEMKE *makes a slight movement.*

ROMÉE

Oh! Who's there?

RIEMKE

I. Don't be frightened.

ROMÉE

I've been looking for you in your room. What are you doing here?

RIEMKE

Nothing. Is it late?

ROMÉE

Past eleven. I was just going home. Aren't you cold by that window?

RIEMKE

No. It is rather warm this evening.

ROMÉE

[*Looking at her.*] What are you unhappy about, Riemke?

RIEMKE

Am I?

ROMÉE

You have been crying.

RIEMKE

No, I don't think I have—where is Nico?

ROMÉE

In the library.

RIEMKE

Hasn't he told you his plan?

ROMÉE

Which one?

RIEMKE

To postpone your going—he wants to stay a whole month longer.

ROMÉE

Yes, he told me about that—I think it's all settled.

RIEMKE

Why? What does he want to do it for?

ROMÉE

He says he feels better and is quite acclimatized now,

but as a matter of fact, I believe it is on your account that he is staying on.

RIEMKE

[*Dully.*] Then he is going to do no such thing.

ROMÉE

Why not? Don't you think he is much calmer and more cheerful than he was last month?

RIEMKE

He imagines he is better than he is. So do you. If he spends the autumn here, everything will happen to him again just as it did before. In the long run, you know, that green canker on the water and the trees and the walls in this place reaches the brain as well. How do we live in this house after all? We drink tea, and dream and read, and philosophize—that's all—we don't *do* anything. Perhaps something has cut us off from life.

ROMÉE

Perhaps it has. And perhaps it is because I feel so ardently alive myself that you are both so dear to me. I love that weakness in you, and your passion-sheltered heart. And as for Nico, his greatest charm for me is not so much his intelligence or his kindness as his unusefulness, his aloofness from things. He has no kind of ambition, he doesn't believe he is of any importance whatever. The other day, at that tea-party at the Verloren's, there were about twenty men and women talking about all sorts of things. Nico just sat there, looking sidelong at them with his eyes half-closed, not saying

a word, and to me he seemed the only real one, the only wise one, the only fine one of them all.

RIEMKE

Yes; there is something fine in silence—and in the desire for death, too.

ROMÉE

What do you mean, the desire for death?

RIEMKE

Romée, there are certain words I am afraid of. I am afraid to apply them to the people I care for because they seem to classify them, don't you know, and take all their glamour away. Still one has to say them sometimes. Nico is not sane, Romée.

ROMÉE

Of course he isn't; who is? Scepticism can be a form of insanity—faith is probably one also. There are some people who are insane with certainties. I know some.

RIEMKE

Are you sure that scepticism is his trouble; all of it?

ROMÉE

What do you mean?

RIEMKE

I sometimes wonder whether he is not becoming the victim of a monomania.

ROMÉE

What monomania? What is worrying you, Riemke?

RIEMKE

Does nothing ever worry you, Romée—any more?
[*A pause.*]

ROMÉE

No, not any more.

RIEMKE

So it seems. Time goes on and nothing happens—so what once seemed full of omen and menace to you has become irrelevant and meaningless now.

ROMÉE

It isn't time that has delivered me from worry, my dear; it is love.

RIEMKE

I don't understand. If danger existed six months ago, it must exist still. Our feelings cannot effect the thing we call our destiny.

ROMÉE

Yes, they can; love can break the spell. I sometimes have a strange feeling that in the halls of the future where our destinies are being built up, there has been a fall somewhere, some kind of displacement has altered the plan of our lives as they were to have been—[*Vehemently.*] I have so longed that he might live! I have so pursued happiness with all my thoughts! It can't have been useless, Riemke. If our passions and our dreams were powerless to create new futures, life would be nothing but a senseless, stupid fraud. They might just as well shut us up in a cage studded with

spikes, and say to us "Dance! Go on, you are free to dance to your heart's content." Life isn't like that!

RIEMKE

You hope, because you have a wholesome mind. I, ruminating vague thoughts continually in my corner, have less confidence. In the first place I don't believe any more in the catch-words we live by; destiny, fate, and so on—they have no meaning to me any more. So that, in this thing that is worrying us— [*She stops.*]

ROMÉE

Well?

RIEMKE

[*Reluctantly.*] I don't want to upset you or make you feel undue responsibility for anything—but I can't help thinking all the same that you hold the key to this mystery, Romée, nobody else.

ROMÉE

I?

RIEMKE

[*Bethinking herself.*] No, never mind. I have no right to alarm you. I have not proof enough to go by.

ROMÉE

Tell me, Riemke; tell me outright what is in your mind—I shall be far more worried if you don't. What is this idea of yours? What are you thinking?

RIEMKE

This: I think that at the time you saw that face in the lake, no danger did threaten Nico. It was neither a

revelation of the past nor of the future; it was only a hallucination. But since—I wonder if that momentary delirium of your brain is not gradually being transformed into reality.

ROMÉE

[*Thoughtfully.*] Is it possible for a thought—a vision—to turn into a reality?

RIEMKE

Occasionally, I dare say—thought is a contagious thing. What you dreamt first, Nico may have dreamt in his turn.

ROMÉE

How?

RIEMKE

You might have unknowingly transmitted your vision to him. And now—it is possible, yes, it is possible that real danger exists for him.

ROMÉE

[*Troubled.*] You haven't thought out this explanation without a motive, Riemke. You are keeping something back—you *know* he is in danger.

RIEMKE

No, no! It is only a supposition. I have been thinking it over, that is all. Don't let it worry you, dear.

ROMÉE

[*Taking her hands.*] You know, you can't tell lies a

bit. Is it so serious that you don't dare to tell me? Look here, Riemke, what is happening?

RIEMKE

[*Fearfully.*] It's probably quite natural—I'm sure it could be explained away—it is a letter from him that I found this evening in the hall. I opened it—on account of the address.

ROMÉE

Whom is it addressed to?

RIEMKE

Gelder, the boat builder—look, I have it here. [*She holds out the letter.*]

ROMÉE

[*Lights the lamp and reads in a tremulous voice.*] "Of all the models you have shown me, the green boat suits my purpose best. Please send it to me for a week's trial." The green boat—oh God!

RIEMKE

There, you are all upset. But there is really nothing to fear, as we are forewarned. We must circumvent this misfortune, mustn't we? We will defend ourselves.

ROMÉE

Against whom? Against what? And by what means?

RIEMKE

By getting Nico away from this place. Once he is gone, we'll be laughing at all this alarm.

ROMÉE

How can we get him away?

RIEMKE

I have thought of a scheme. You know my friend the Velsen girl is getting married. She lives just outside Rotterdam. I had refused her invitation but nothing would be easier than to—

ROMÉE

[*Interrupting her sharply with terror in her voice.*] Riemke—

RIEMKE

What is it?

ROMÉE

Riemke, I have committed a terrible folly—a few days ago he was telling me about that illness he had—he said that once long ago he wanted to kill himself.

RIEMKE

I never knew—

ROMÉE

Nobody did—but he tried.

RIEMKE

Did he throw himself into the lake?

ROMÉE

That was my first thought, too—oh, why didn't I hide it from him? Why didn't I keep quiet? But I was so upset to think of his doing such a thing and so

relieved that the explanation of my dream had come at last, that I spoke to him about the lake—I asked him how they had rescued him from the water—

RIEMKE

Well?

ROMÉE

He looked at me in surprise—he hadn't thrown himself into the water at all. He had hanged himself in the loft! [*She sobs.*] You were right—it is I who have put the idea into his mind—it is I who have sent him to his death.

CURTAIN

FIFTH SCENE

The drawing-room. It is Autumn—the sun is setting in a golden sky. SAIDYAH *is sitting cross-legged in the centre of the room, absorbed in idle reverie.* NICO *enters, rear.*

NICO

What are you doing there, Saidyah? You look as immovable as one of our old beeches. What are you thinking about?

SAIDYAH

Nothing, Toewan, nothing.

NICO

No doubt. What could you be thinking about, after all? Perhaps those who imagine they are thinking of something are also really thinking of nothing at all. For who knows whether there is anything to think about?

[SAIDYAH *pulls a pipe from his girdle and asks with a gesture for permission to light it.*]

Yes, yes, light up. [SAIDYAH *does so.*] Isn't this room cold for you?

SAIDYAH

No, Toewan.

NICO

We shan't be here much longer, Saidyah. Before

winter we'll have left this country. Aren't you glad to be going back to Java?

SAIDYAH

If the master is glad, I am glad. But what is the use of changing one's place?

NICO

Yes, what *is* the use? Besides, is it possible ever to change one's place, really? [*He sits down.*] I like talking to you, Saidyah. You understand me better than anyone else.

SAIDYAH

I should love the master very little if I did not understand him.

NICO

My sister loves me, too, so does my fiancée. And yet, for some time past I haven't been able to talk to them. Saidyah, do you know what space is?

SAIDYAH

It is the little road the ant travels between two blades of grass: it is the great empty road my eye travels on its way to the stars.

NICO

And time, do you know what that is?

SAIDYAH

It is a road also.

NICO

Saidyah, there is no such thing as either space or time.

SAIDYAH

If the master says so it must be true.

NICO

I knew you would understand me.

SAIDYAH

The sun is going down all ready, Toewan, and I begin to smell the marshes. Hadn't I better close the windows?

[NICO *does not answer. A pause.*]

NICO

[*Beside the bay-window.*] Look at those summer flies over the lake. They fly round and round in the yellow light as though they were drunk or mad. They remind me of old men clinging to the sunshine. Four hours ago they were not yet in their prime; since then they have felt thirty or forty years of human life pass over them. This evening—that is to say, in ten years' time—they will die under the bushes. Time is a dream, Saidyah.

SAIDYAH

[*Shaking his head.*] Surely something has passed on, though, since the days when the master was a child and the babu used to bathe his little body in a copper basin on the verandah every morning.

NICO

[*Stretching out on a couch, beside Saidyah.*] No—it is our minds that have moved across an unmoving dream. Yesterday, today, tomorrow, are only words,

Saidyah, words which correspond to no reality except within our narrow brains, for beyond our brains there is neither past nor future, nothing but one vast present. Within eternity, we are at once about to be, living and dead. Do you fear death, Saidyah?

SAIDYAH

Yes, Toewan, so long as you still live.

NICO

I don't—it doesn't matter to me one way or the other. I don't even know whether— [*He stops.*] To die is not to sleep, nor to dream—living is that—trees, earth, fogs and all the rest—they are the inexplicable dream. To die is to awaken, to know, maybe to reach that point in eternity where time is no longer a dream, the frontier where all things are co-existent.

SAIDYAH

Is the master unhappy? Who has been troubling him?

NICO

No one, Saidyah, no one.

SAIDYAH

Sometimes, when he was a child, the master's little heart used to grow sad and then he would sit gazing into space as though he was falling asleep. But I had only to show him the round patches of sunlight on the mats or the golden clouds over the palm forests and he would be quite gay again at once.

NICO

I don't believe in the clouds any more, Saidyah. I don't believe in the sunlight either. They don't exist;

or if something does exist which corresponds to what we call clouds and sunlight, we can't know what it is. We never will know anything we see with our eyes or hear with our ears or pass through the filter of our minds. Ah, Saidyah, it isn't the dreaming that matters, it's knowing one's dreaming that is fearful. Walking, and knowing there is no solid earth under your feet; stretching out your arms and knowing they never can reach anything at all—for all things are phantoms and the shadows of phantoms. Say, if there were such a thing as a road to certainty, to reality, wouldn't you set out upon it rejoicing?

SAIDYAH

[*Shaking his head.*] The master is unhappy and he will not tell me why. And I do not know how to cheer him. Is there nobody who can bring him peace? Is there nothing left on earth that he can love?

NICO

[*Thinking.*] I love the water. [*A pause—in a tone of mystery.*] You mustn't mention this to anyone, Saidyah—they wouldn't understand. They would try and part me from the water that I love—who knows what pretexts they might invent?

SAIDYAH

The master can trust me.

NICO

In the beginning I disliked the water—I thought it swampy and too still, horrible. But I have looked at it a great deal since; I've spent hours leaning over it, watching it—and now I have grown to love it. It lies in

dark pools at the foot of the old walls, like staring eyes filled with the knowledge of truth. As for the water of the big lake—I don't know why, but it reminds me of Romée. It is like Romée—full of passions and angers held in leash—sometimes it quivers suddenly here and there without apparent reason—well, when Romée is startled or thwarted in anything and tries to hide her anger, one of her cheeks gives a slight quiver just like the water. [*A pause.*] That lake looks clear, Saidyah, but it isn't. Beneath the surface where it is bright with the reflection of the sky, there lies a whole dark and impenetrable world. [*Whispering.*] When you look into Romée's eyes it is the same. Their clearness is only on the surface—below there are the same shadows, the same cold mystery. It is a very strange resemblance. I spoke of it to her one day but she didn't understand. For a long time I believed that she alone could give me peace of mind, and a hold on things—now I wonder if this truth I seek is not at the bottom of the water—right down underneath the marsh.

SAIDYAH

[*In a low voice.*] If truth is where you say it is, Toewan, long live illusion!

CURTAIN

SIXTH SCENE

The drawing-room. Four o'clock in the afternoon. MRS. BEUNKE *sits dreaming by the fire.* RIEMKE *enters, right. She is in a traveling cloak and carries a grip in her hand. She is fastening the last button of her glove.*

RIEMKE

Have you ordered the carriage, Mrs. Beunke?

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, Miss Riemke. Jan is harnessing the horses.

RIEMKE

Isn't Mr. Nico ready yet?

MRS. BEUNKE

He has gone up to his room, Miss Riemke.

RIEMKE

Are you sure?

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Surprised.*] Why yes, Miss Riemke. He is packing his bag.

RIEMKE

[*Looking at her watch.*] I was thinking of the train —we haven't much more time.

MRS. BEUNKE

What day shall I expect you back, Miss Riemke?

RIEMKE

[*Turning her head away.*] Sunday, Mrs. Beunke, Sunday for certain; we'll be home in time for dinner.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Bringing out her account-book.*] I will have everything ready for you. Won't you please just look over my accounts before you go, Miss Riemke?

RIEMKE

No, there's no time and besides I feel so dreadfully tired, Mrs. Beunke.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Sighing.*] This makes more than a week since you have seen them—it is a great responsibility on my shoulders.

[ROMÉE *comes in.*]

RIEMKE

[*Not paying any attention to what Mrs. Beunke is saying.*] Mrs. Beunke, will you please go up stairs to Mr. Nico's room—I am too tired.

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, Miss Riemke—but what for?

RIEMKE

Why, to hurry him up—tell him we are waiting.

MRS. BEUNKE

Very well, Miss Riemke. [*She goes out.*]

RIEMKE

[*In a low voice.*] Now remember what you have to do—Nico and I will be at the Van Velsen's this evening; the wedding is tomorrow morning. You are to stay here and send your wire the day after tomorrow evening, not before, and you leave for Rotterdam on Sunday.

ROMÉE

I understand. Are you going to tell Ida Van Velsen?

RIEMKE

No. Our visit doesn't need any more explanation than I gave her. She asked me to her wedding and I said my brother's being here prevented me from getting away, then it turns out that Nico wants to go with me after all, so I change my mind and we go. That is the explanation I gave her in my letter; it will do.

ROMÉE

Tell me—that telegram—if I make it too urgent and desperate, it will give Nico a bad shock, and on the other hand, if I make it too indefinite and reassuring he might not be in any hurry to leave and want to come back here first and take the next boat instead.

RIEMKE

Yes, the idea of leaving at once must come from you. You must say something like this— "Have received cable Java—parents anxious—father very ill—not critical but wants Nico back soon as possible." And then add "I advise going immediately. S.S. *Samarang* leaves Rotterdam Monday. Meet you there with Saidyah and luggage."

ROMÉE

Nothing about money?

RIEMKE

No—He has a letter of credit on a Rotterdam bank.

ROMÉE

And if he insists on coming back here?

RIEMKE

I will dissuade him.

ROMÉE

Sh! Here he is.

NICO

[*Enters right, a suitcase in his hand.*] Is this necessary? Really necessary?

RIEMKE

What?

NICO

This visit?

RIEMKE

Why of course it is, Nico—they are expecting us and you promised—

NICO

You made me promise, you mean. The whole thing strikes me suddenly as so ridiculous, going to stay with people I haven't seen for fifteen years. I suppose one has to talk to their guests?

RIEMKE

And what if one does?

NICO

But I have nothing to say to them—or to any one else.

ROMÉE

Any one else?

NICO

[*Looks at her then drops his eyes.*] It seems to me now that every word I utter puts me farther and farther away from people—even from those I care for.

RIEMKE

[*Sadly.*] Nico!

NICO

I can't help it.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Coming in.*] The carriage is waiting.

RIEMKE

Let's hurry or we'll miss the train. [*Kisses* ROMÉE.] Till Sunday, darling. [*Exit left.*]

ROMÉE

[*In a low voice, to* NICO.] Don't be unhappy, dear. Don't think of me if the thought weighs on you—let yourself live. Nobody wants to thwart you in any way —you are perfectly free.

[MRS. BEUNKE *has taken* RIEMKE'S *bag and gone out, left.*]

NICO

Oh!—perhaps it is better to be the slave of living people than of one's thoughts. [*With childish fretfulness.*] But why can't they leave me in peace? Why do they have to drag me to people's houses—when I want to be alone and lie down on the ground and go to sleep?

ROMÉE

[*Emphatically.*] You need distraction, Nico. This visit will do you good. It will indeed.

NICO

You see, none of them can let me alone, not even you.

RIEMKE'S VOICE

Are you coming, Nico? We are going to miss that train.

[NICO *makes a movement of annoyance; then kisses* ROMÉE.]

NICO

Au revoir.

ROMÉE

I'll see you soon again, darling.

[NICO *goes out.* ROMÉE *goes to the window and watches the carriage drive away. She waves her hand.* MRS. BEUNKE *comes in.*]

MRS. BEUNKE

Won't you have supper with me, Miss Romée?

ROMÉE

No thanks, Mrs. Beunke. Make the most of these few days to rest in—you look awfully tired.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Agitated.*] Oh, I am always that and shall be till the end of my days, I am sure. Tiredness is nothing—what kills me is all the cares and worries that I have, Miss Romée.

ROMÉE

[*Incredulous.*] Whatever can you have to worry you to that extent?

MRS. BEUNKE

These accounts, Miss Romée. Generally Miss Riemke goes over them for me every day—it is a great relief. But all this week she has been thinking of something else and hasn't had time to even look at them. There is a mistake of four florins—I dare not tell her. I have gone through my additions over and over again and I can't find the mistake—I can't sleep for worrying over it, Miss Romée.

ROMÉE

Why, all you have to do is to put in the four florins out of your own pocket, I should think.

MRS. BEUNKE

[*In despair.*] That will not take the mistake away—the four florins don't matter; it is the mistake that is terrible. [*Taking out her book.*] Won't you please look at my figures, Miss Romée? Maybe you will find the mistake at once—who knows?

ROMÉE

[*Almost harshly.*] No, Mrs. Beunke. I don't like the idea of fretting one's life away over such nonsense.

MRS. BEUNKE

I beg your pardon, Miss Romée. [*The telephone rings;* MRS. BEUNKE *answers it.*] Hello—Mr. Van Eyden has just left—who is speaking please? What do you say? No, Mr. Van Eyden will not be back before Sunday.

ROMÉE

Who is it?

MRS. BEUNKE

Mr. Gelder, the boat-builder.

ROMÉE

Oh, I know about that—let me talk to him. [*She takes the receiver.*] Hello—what is it, Mr. Gelder? A letter? About that boat? Very likely—he didn't mention it. Very well, I will apologize to him for you. What?—What do you say? No, no—it's no use, as he is away. Wait—wait a few days. Besides, I think he changed his mind. What? Oh, already? All right, you must—perhaps you could— No, of course not—never mind, it can't be helped now. Good-bye. [*She hangs up.*] It seems they have just bought a boat from Gelder's. Did you see it come?

MRS. BEUNKE

No, Miss Romée. The gardener must have received it. [*Anxiously.*] Was it to be paid for?

ROMÉE

I don't know.

MRS. BEUNKE

Miss Riemke hasn't left me any money.

ROMÉE

[*At window, to herself.*] That was it—yes, that was it.

MRS. BEUNKE

I shall not pay for anything until Miss Riemke comes home.

SAIDYAH

[*Entering, right.*] Is it true, Nonna, that he has gone without saying good-bye to me?

ROMÉE

He will be back in two days, Saidyah.

SAIDYAH

He has gone because he is not happy here.

ROMÉE

[*Turning round.*] How do you know?

SAIDYAH

He tells me everything. He suffers because he seeks the way.

ROMÉE

What way?

SAIDYAH

The way of Truth. I know what it is—I have seen men in the Indies who were like him. Woman, sister, children, no living person pleases their hearts. So they go—with a disciple or a boy to beg their rice—and they become wanderers upon the earth. They visit the towns

and the beggars and the holy places; for years they wander on and on. One day they meet the Buddah on a mountain or at a crossroads and they are happy. But there are some who do not meet the Buddah, and they let themselves starve to death in the depths of some jungle. [*A pause, shakes his head.*] I do not believe our child will ever meet the Buddah. I knew he would go some day, but I hoped he would take me with him. I would have followed him everywhere and left him alone before the end, for it does happen that the Buddah manifests himself at the last minute of the last hour. Our child did not want me. I shall never see him again.

ROMÉE

But, Saidyah, haven't I told you he will be home on Sunday?

SAIDYAH

I have had news, Nonna.

ROMÉE

What news?

SAIDYAH

News from the wind, Nonna.

MRS. BEUNKE

Leave us alone, Saidyah, you see you are worrying Miss Romée.

SAIDYAH

[*Going out.*] Yes, yes, I am going.

ROMÉE

Poor Saidyah. Riemke says he would give his life for Nico.

MRS. BEUNKE

That is no reason why one should put up with him in the drawing-room. He would come and smoke his pipe here every day if one let him. Miss Riemke does spoil him so.

ROMÉE

[*Sharply.*] What is the time by your watch, Mrs. Beunke?

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Looking at her watch.*] Five o'clock, Miss Romée.

ROMÉE

Isn't that when the train goes?

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes.

ROMÉE

[*Sighing with relief.*] They must be in their compartment now—do you think they are in their compartment, Mrs. Beunke?

MRS. BEUNKE

Yes, most likely, unless the train is late coming in.

ROMÉE

[*Putting on her hat.*] That's good. It's a fine day, Mrs. Beunke.

MRS. BEUNKE

A little misty these last few minutes.

ROMÉE

[*Looking out of window.*] Why, so it is.

MRS. BEUNKE

That kind doesn't last long though, it is only a sea flame.

[ROMÉE *is silent, motionless beside the window. The phone rings.*]

ROMÉE

Again—

MRS. BEUNKE

[*At the telephone.*] Hello—yes, this is Mrs. Beunke. What? I don't understand. Please say that again? Who is talking, please? What—What is the matter? Don't shout so loud.

ROMÉE

What is it?

MRS. BEUNKE

I can't make out, Miss Romée. I don't even know who is talking.

ROMÉE

Wait. [*She takes the receiver.*] Hello. This is Miss Cremers. Who are you? [*Astonished.*] Jan the coachman? Why aren't they gone? Whatever is the matter with her? [*To* MRS. BEUNKE.] Riemke is ill—

MRS. BEUNKE

Oh dear; oh dear!

ROMÉE

[*At the phone.*] When did it happen? [*To* MRS. BEUNKE.] She was taken ill at the station. [*At the phone.*] Who is the doctor? Very well—listen—tell him I am coming right over and ask him if he needs anything.

MRS. BEUNKE

Is it serious?

ROMÉE

No, just a fainting spell, I hope. Dr. Krall happened to be at the station. He carried her into a waiting-room and is with her now.

MRS. BEUNKE

She hasn't been well for days. She cannot stand any excitement—going away and having luggage to see to is too much for her.

ROMÉE

[*At the telephone.*] Hello—all right. [*To* MRS. BEUNKE.] Mrs. Beunke will you please get a little ether from the medicine-chest? [MRS. BEUNKE *hurries out.* ROMÉE *at the phone.*] Hello—are you sure that is all he wanted? Good. Is Miss Riemke better? Still unconscious? Yes, all right, I am coming. I'll run through the park; it will take about five minutes. [*She hangs up.* MRS. BEUNKE *comes back with a vial of ether.*]

MRS. BEUNKE

Do you want me to go with you, Miss Romée?

ROMÉE

No. You had better get her bed ready—they may bring her back any minute.

[She goes quickly out left. MRS. BEUNKE *goes out right. The stage remains empty a long moment, then* NICO *comes left. He lies down and falls into a deep meditation.]*

MRS. BEUNKE

[Comes in right her account book in her hand. She gives a start when she sees NICO.] You, Mr. Nico?

NICO

[Not moving.] Yes, she doesn't need anyone. The doctor is there.

MRS. BEUNKE

Didn't you meet Miss Romée?

NICO

No.

MRS. BEUNKE

She left right after Jan called up. She went through the park.

NICO

I came back by the road.

MRS. BEUNKE

Aren't you anxious, Mr. Nico?

NICO

About Riemke? Yes, she will wake too soon. One always wakes too soon. *[Raising his eyes to her face.]*

Why are you looking at me as though I were some queer sort of animal? What is that book in your hand?

MRS. BEUNKE

My accounts, Mr. Nico. I have made a mistake. So I was just—

NICO

Show me. [*She shows him the book and the page. He corrects one addition, first to himself, then aloud in a low voice.*] Seven and three make nine.

MRS. BEUNKE

Ten, Mr. Nico, ten.

NICO

Why not nine or twelve?

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Dismayed.*] Seven and three make ten.

NICO

Prove it.

MRS. BEUNKE

But—

NICO

You can't. You couldn't ever prove that two and two make four. Numbers don't exist. They are a convention of thought. Your accounts are not real, they are nothing but signs of things eaten, drunk and distributed and destroyed. Your accounts will always be

WRONG, MRS. BEUNKE. [*He throws the book on the floor.*]

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Worried.*] What is the matter with you, Mr. Nico?

NICO

I am sleepy. But sleep is so short, so short. Tell me, Mrs. Beunke, if a doctor told you that he knew of a way to clear out your little skull and replace its present contents with hay or lettuce leaves, wouldn't you beg him to perform that admirable operation on you?

MRS. BEUNKE

I am sure it is a sin to listen to such things, Mr. Nico.

NICO

But wouldn't you? No? You must be anxious to keep your 995 grams of brain then? I'm not. [*He gets up.*] Just think—good-bye worries, good-bye accounts and dust and housekeeping—everything would disappear, walls, trees, earth, stars, time, thought—everything . . . and yourself of course!

MRS. BEUNKE

Oh, dear! I have never seen you like this. . . .

NICO

[*Indistinctly.*] Nor have I. Because today I know you don't exist where I see you. [*Puts his hand to his forehead.*] Here's where you are. Only here. [*She steps back, afraid.*] As for this phantom which seems to talk and move about in front of me—I know nothing whatever about it. [*He closes his eyes; his face con-*

tracts.] I can see it elsewhere and answer it elsewhere.

MRS. BEUNKE

You are not well, Mr. Nico—you ought to go to bed.

[NICO *opens his eyes—turns his head away and answers an imaginary* MRS. BEUNKE *at the other end of the room.*]

NICO

Yes, that's just what I was thinking of doing—going to bed. [*He crosses slowly over to the door, left.*]

MRS. BEUNKE

Not that way. This is the way to your room. [*She points to the rear.*]

NICO

[*Still speaking to the left.*] I am going to change rooms, Mrs Beunke.

MRS. BEUNKE

There aren't any rooms on this side of the house.

NICO

[*Reaching doorway pretends to pat somebody's shoulder.*] Good night, Mrs. Beunke, good night. [*He goes out without turning round.* MRS. BEUNKE *goes forward hesitatingly towards the left.*]

MRS. BEUNKE

Oh, where are you going to, Mr. Nico? [*She follows him out,* ROMÉE *enters right a few seconds later.*]

ROMÉE

[*Calling.*] Mrs. Beunke, where are you?

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Coming back, left.*] Here I am, here I am.

ROMÉE

I have brought her back in the doctor's car. She is better. Is her room ready?

MRS. BEUNKE

[*Agitated.*] Not yet, Miss Romée.

ROMÉE

What? Not yet?

MRS. BEUNKE

It's not my fault, Miss Romée.

ROMÉE

What have you been doing?

MRS. BEUNKE

It is Mr. Nico. . . . He has been saying such things—Oh, he is certainly not well.

ROMÉE

[*Distracted.*] Nico has come back? Where is he?

MRS. BEUNKE

He has just left the house. I saw him go down towards the lake.

ROMÉE

Towards the lake— Ah! [*Hardly has she glanced through the window when she sways as though struck by a bullet and sinks silently to the ground.*]

CURTAIN

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